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KEITH OF KINNELLAN

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Constable & Company Limited
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BOMBAY
CALCUTTA MADRAS

Oxford University
Press

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TORONTO

The Macmillan Company
of Canada, Limited

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NEW YORK

Richard R. Smith Inc

KEITH OF KINNELLAN

by

AGNES MURE MACKENZIE

Author of "The Quiet Lady," "The Process of Literature," etc.

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MACKAYS LIMITED, CHATHAM

NOTE

Lost Kinnellan was published separately in 1927. *The Falling Wind* appears now for the first time. The persons, incidents, and domestic interiors in both are purely imaginary.

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I

LOST KINNELLAN

To

JEAN MACKENZIE MACKENZIE

My Dear Jock,

The dedication of a book that (apart from anything to do with its quality) can please neither the few conventional nor the many who are orthodoxly otherwise, is an honour so doubtful you might fairly have declined it, if only I had given you the chance. But the London novel that by rights should have been yours has long adorned the Corporation ash-cart, and I certainly owe you such compliment as a flyleaf may involve. It is six years now since we set up house in Bloomsbury, with a plane-tree outside the window, a hole in the floor, and most of our chattels somewhere between the Minch and London River: and I have written six books in that time. By all the laws of the best modern fiction, we ought to have parted brass-rags long ago; whereas instead,

I remain, and hope to continue,

Your affectionate sister and housemate,

A.M.M'K.

St. John's Wood, February, 1927.

CHAPTER I

" Now stood this castel faste by the see."
The Frankeleyns Tale.

THE wind blew hard on shore against the sunlight, and the flood-tide under the cliff boiled like a pot, lifting green swirls with curving glassy folds in them, streaming pale green on rocks to frothy incessant bursts of bright white foam. There was a ledge of turf high in the cliff, and a young man lay there, looking through salty space down to the water, till the sound and movement, and the contented fatigue of a long swim, made him drowsy and he turned on his side and slept.

He was a man of seven or eight and twenty, not notably tall for that countryside but powerful, with accurate unhurried movements suggesting strength controlled by a quick will. As became a Keith of the line of the old Earls Marischal, he was dark as a Spaniard, lean-lipped and high-cheekboned, with white strong teeth under a clipped moustache, and eyes unexpectedly light, of the bright clear brown that turns to yellow-grey under excitement. His hand, flung out at the wrist of a shabby jacket, was a gentleman's and reasonably tended, but hard in the palm and grazed across the knuckles, with a speck of tar under the rim of a nail. There were in fact few things about a farm or a fishing-boat that he could not do, and he had done them often enough, from necessity as much as choice, though he found them no hardship. It was only now and then, as to-day when the breaking of a cross-grained

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four-year-old had stirred him to swim the currents off Kincraig, that the Keith blood, crossed (and uncooled) with Carrick Kennedy, rebelled at a life spent nursing chilly acres above the iron coast of Kincardineshire.

If the subsistence had been easier he would have been less patient, probably. His barren heritage lay beyond the rich Howe of the Mearns, in the North Sea winds. To fight a living from it and its few poor farms and the one huddled red-roofed fisher village gave employment to those qualities in the race that had sent his father out with Garibaldi and made his grandfather a privateer. It was this last, Captain Keith of the *Let Them Say*, who had bought back Kinnellan after a hundred years, patched the old walls and furnished it again expensively, and left it after him to a spendthrift widow and one son, James, who found contemporary Scotland too placid for his tastes and went abroad, till his French wife died and he came home, a man of forty, from wars in South America and Italy, married again, a hard-riding Bargany Kennedy, and had one son by her when she broke her neck at a treacherous dry-stone dyke.

James Keith himself was like to die in his bed, since for many years now his sole change of place had been to be lifted daily to a great chair, or back at night to the room called the King's Chamber—why, no one could say, for Kinnellan had housed no king that anyone knew of, nor ever played much part in history. The Keith cadet who had built it on French plans in the fifteenth century had ridden to Flodden behind the Marischal banner, and mortally wounded, helped the standard-bearer, Skirving of Plewlandhill, to bind the silver and scarlet about his body, where he wore it through his two years of captivity. Kinnellan had not lived to see a prison, and his four sons died in the ring

about King James. There was a James Keith, younger of Kinnellan, in Ogilvy of Barras' starving garrison, that held the Honours from Cromwell at Dunnottar: his father seems to have fought under Montrose, and it was certainly John his great-grandson who lost Kinnellan after the 'Fifteen, was aide-de-camp to Marshal Keith in Prussia, and later to the Earl, the Marshal's brother, when he went to Spain as Prussian ambassador. He married a Spanish lady as poor as himself, Doña Maria Pilar de Alarcón y Soto de la Ruba, and their son was in French service in the East Indies under the Scots Marquis de Lauriston. The Jacobitical past was overlooked, and his grandson again had letters-of-marque in 'Five, made a decent fortune out of privateering, and used it to buy back the harsh windy acres: so his grandson Gilbert would in time be "of Kinnellan," though after three years' marriage he had no heir.

The sun drove north of west and the wind was falling. A shaft of the strong clear light fell on Keith's eyes, and he smiled in his sleep, woke, and rolled over again, facing the sea. The tide on Catteraw had ebbed considerably.

He sat up, flung a glance at the sky, and had no need to look at his old silver watch. He wasted no time in wakening, but almost in that movement was on his feet and had hold of the knob of rock above his ledge. Swinging himself to the cornice of the cliff he made off down wind, along the narrow strip between cliff and cornfield. He knew from experience it was less trouble to be home in decently punctual time for dinner.

He crossed a dry-stone dyke to a field path, that led from Kinnellan to the little village, and leaping down almost trod on a young woman. She was sitting below the wall, gazing at the bright flag on Kinnellan Tower,

and so intent had been her contemplation of it that she had failed to hear his quick light step. She rose and looked up, her colour growing vivid, and shook her flounced skirts straightly into place: her brown dress was ill cut but not a countrywoman's, with a bow of gay pink ribbon at the throat, and a silver locket. He had got through half a sentence of apology when he recognised the schoolmistress from Skares.

"I am sorry if I have startled you, Miss Duncan."

She looked up, her black eyes bright. "I should not have thought you would have known my name."

He showed a trace of surprise. "We all know each other's names and business in this countryside. And I see you every Sunday in Skares kirk." He did not add that his wife disapproved of her hats.

"Of course," she said. "I teach your cottars' bairns."

If she was looking for gallantry she did not get it, for he answered with a laugh, "You have my sympathy. I doubt those loons are a wild lot enough—and the lassies, I suspect, not so much better. But there's good stuff in them. One of the village lads was Third Bursar a year ago."

The dark eyes languished up at him pathetically. "I find them rather difficult—as a stranger. I come from Glasgow, you know—I was at the Normal. And I've never been accustomed to the country."

The plea of strangerhood was one to touch a Scot, and the girl was pretty, though hardly, one would have imagined, fragile: her pink was less a wild-rose than a pæony. He said, kindly enough: "They'll be less alarming when you've had time to get used to them, and a well-applied tawse now and then is good for discipline."

She sighed, with a trim round shape in the tight bodice, that showed as she lifted an arm and touched her fringe. But he was looking past her along the path. She stood in the middle of it, and he could not pass without treading in among the half-grown oats. And he wanted his dinner. She went on: "The sound of the sea is so romantic, isn't it? I hope you don't mind my wandering through your fields?"

"Not at all. This path is a public one, you know. And anyhow, this field is part of the Mains." He had a vague sense then of being inhospitable, and added, "It's a very pleasant walk." She had turned sideways, and he contrived to pass her. He lifted his cap and smiled. "Good-night, Miss Duncan."

Isa Duncan watched him as he strode away from her. She was frowning a little: still, he knew her name. He had evidently noticed her in church. She decided that after all she could afford the hat with the red ribbons that was in Miss Hendry's window in Stonehaven.

CHAPTER II

" You shall not die for lack of a dinner."
As You Like It.

WHEN Gilbert Keith, having changed, came to his father's room a little later, old Taggart was already with his master. Gilbert and he took the shafts of the chair and lifted: James Keith accepted other meals in his own room, but for dinner he would always be borne to the head of the table, to preside there patriarchally, in form. The palsy that crippled his limbs had not affected the set of his fine shoulders: at seventy, his hair was a clear white, with bushy eyebrows only slightly grizzled, and eyes with a fighting brightness in them yet.

His daughter-in-law came in, a little flustered: her dress had lost a hook at the last moment, just out of reach of efforts with a safety-pin, and Gilbert was gone down when she called to him. She explained at some length exactly what had happened, and the two men, eating their broth, heard her with an accustomed courteous patience. Bertha was a good soul, good-humoured always and an admirable housekeeper: if her father-in-law contrasted her at times with memories of fiery Janet Kennedy, or of his French first wife Solange de Méran, he had never shown even surprise at his son's choice. Bertha was not the most amusing company, but she saw with thoroughness to an old man's comforts: and if her pink satin gown might have been fresher, it was not her fault she should still be wearing relics of her trousseau.

When the haddocks came in she had finished her explanation, and the men had leisure to discuss their own affairs—the price of hay, the latest political crime of Mr. Gladstone, or a volume of very fresh and entertaining stories the old man had just received from a friend in India. Bertha relapsed into respectful silence, and moved the pink satin train out of Taggart's way: he had been a gentleman's body-servant and was so still, and the quasi-butlership that he combined with it had lapses at times, especially in dealing with his mistress, who always regarded him rather uneasily. She liked the pink satin, though it was getting old-fashioned now. Bustles were smaller this year, and the passementerie had lost rather a lot of beads. She remarked in a pause, "I think I will have this dress dyed, Gilbert. It's quite good satin."

Her husband, who was carving, nodded casually. "Just as you think, my dear. If the hay does decently, I can stand you a new one."

"Thank you, Gilbert. My pale blue is getting rather shabby, but I'm not sure I don't really want a best cloth one more."

"As you like. I've business in Aberdeen next week, and you can see about it then if you care to come up with me." Most of his attention was on the joint, which had been awkwardly cut. His father came of a day when carving was part of a gentleman's table manners, and had brought up his son punctiliously.

Bertha turned to the old man. "Don't you think claret would be nice for this one, Father? Or a nice warm red?"

"I should have the claret if I were you, Bertha. Or black. A fair woman always looks well in black."

"But it's so dingy. I don't like dark colours." It

was true, and Kinnellan looked at her a little sadly. He had borne with the pallid pink for a long time now, and it had got a little on his nerves.

He sipped his Graves. "I should not presume to dictate to a lady on such a subject, my dear. But I think that if you do not care for black, you will find the wine-colour more—suitable." It was a useful word. Bertha's marriage had been, socially, promotion, and she had an honest desire to be an adequate chatelaine of Kinnellan. He thought he had at least staved off the crimson.

He had, but Gilbert's promise of a visit to Aberdeen led her into a discussion of new napery, and thence to the shortcomings of Bella-Maggie, who was weekly responsible for the Kinnellan wash. Gilbert had heard it before: the apple-tart and cream put a pleasant finish on a well-cooked dinner, but he wished Bertha would be a little less domestic. He had enjoyed his afternoon of truantry. Then, being a just man and in most things patient, he reminded himself that these things were her business, as hay and horse-breaking, rents and rotation of crops were his own. He watched the reflected lights from the sea and the silver, and listened to the familiar sound rather than words.

Taggart, who had put the decanters in place and gone away, returned just then to announce a visitor, Mr. Archie Hailes of Pitarlo. Kinnellan looked up. "Young Pitarlo? Bring him ben at once, man. Bertha, it's odds he has not had his dinner. Can you give him anything to eat?"

But young Hailes had dined early, in Stonehaven. He accepted a glass of Kinnellan's port, and apologising for his untimely arrival, delivered his father's messages: he had come to ask Gilbert's advice on a sick horse, and

expected to meet him at Stonehaven market. Mrs. Keith had gone, and the others listened with interest, and gave him the receipt of a useful drench.

In time the talk turned easily to fishing. Young Hailes had been staying with cousins on the Dee. From rod to gun was a step, and from gun to pistol. Kinnellan was in a mood for reminiscence, and described a duel he had seen in Italy, between a New Englander and a fire-eating Sicilian : he told the story well, and made them laugh. The room was growing dark as the light coloured, and the deep laughter echoed in it strangely. Kinnellan said, " They tell me you handle the sabre, Mr. Hailes ? "

" So-so, sir. I prefer the epee. The point is more to my taste on the whole than the edge."

" I agree with you as far as preference goes. But I've seen some pretty work with the sabre too in my time, and it's certainly more use in a melee. Would you care for a bout with Gilbert there, at either ? It is a long time since I heard the blades."

Gilbert was eager to second the invitation, and Hailes, who was justly a little vain of his skill, to accept. So when Gilbert and Taggart had carried old Kinnellan to the gallery that ran along the wing, the two young men went off together to change.

In the gallery the light was still quite tolerable. It had large windows on the garden that it sheltered, and the light of the setting sun struck through them level. The old man sat in his chair with a plaid about him, and Bertha brought her work to an embrasure. The warmer light was kinder to her pink satin and the sunflowers she had been embroidering for a mantel border. Kinnellan had been furnished in 1820, and not touched since in nearly seventy years : but she had improved

the drawing-room somewhat of late. She looked at the two young men, who were talking gaily by a rack of arms. The baggy canvas trousers, buttoned below the knee, were hardly becoming, but Gilbert, to be sure, always looked distinguished: Mrs. Gilbert Keith of Kinnellan could afford to look pityingly down on Jessie Rae, who had patronised her when she got that minister.

Gilbert had taken a pair of epees from the rack, swung the hilts over his left fore-arm and offered them to his antagonist. His slight inclination of the body as he did so would have set his grandfather's fine lawn ruffles a good deal better than a patched canvas jacket and a gauntlet scratched and torn with *points d'arrêt*.

They saluted towards Kinnellan and Mrs. Keith, put on their masks, and faced each other on a strip of matting. The blades flashed up again in the salute, swung into guard, and for a moment were almost still, in delicate circling feints each about other. Then Hailes attacked: there was a fierce and rapid phrase of arms, the *clock* and *clock* of the three-sided blades, the *clong* of one great cup-hilt in a parry, above the continual sound of the sea without. Hailes wiled the other's hilt up, and lunged low: Gilbert went back like a ballerina, caught the blade, and got home on him with a well-timed flanconade. There was a shout of "*Touche!*" that made Mrs. Keith prick her finger, a sketched salute, and they engaged again: the rapid blades circled against the shadows, and the old man watched with eyes hardly less bright.

Both combatants were admirable swordsmen, and very evenly matched in reach and length. For a long time it was hit for hit and none too many of them, till Gilbert grew careless, and took the other's point hard

on the chest. He grinned with a shake of the head and a shout of "*Touche!*" and when Hailes cried "Five more?" saluted and went in like a wild-cat, the white of his laughter gleaming through the wires. The five were his: Hailes only hit him once, and whipping his mask off began to sing, a little breathlessly:

"I've focht by land, I've focht by sea,
At hame I focht my auntie O,
But I met the deevil and Dundee
On the braes o' Killiecrankie O."

He turned to the old man, laughing. "Keith's byous ill to tackle when he wakens." Kinnellan laughed, but Mrs. Keith was not too pleased. She disapproved of Scotticisms. But she was glad all the same Gilbert had won, and that she had remembered they would want hot water.

CHAPTER III

" King Pandion, he is dead :
All thy friends are lapped in lead."
The Passionate Pilgrim.

She sang to them afterwards when they had changed again, and was flattered when old Kinnellan demanded to be carried to the drawing-room. It was in the tower, the oldest of the place, with cramped small windows looking out to sea, and a larger oriel over the garden. The arched stone chimney of the fifteenth century had given way to one of slim green marble ; but Bertha had found the marble cold and old-fashioned, and since Gilbert declined encaustic tiles and—what grieved her more—the overmantel she longed for, had draped it in blue and gold with a ball fringe. It was very up-to-date, and stood out vividly in the reticent setting of panelled walls and Regency mahogany. There were cushions to match the mantel on the sofa : she had painted, already, a milking-stool and a tambourine with daisies, and a very nice fur rug was on the worst part of the old French carpet, whose green had faded almost into grey.

Bertha's soprano voice was clear and powerful, and by no means badly trained. Gilbert, who though not musical himself approved that she should be, had brought her, lately, a couple of new songs from Aberdeen—a sweet new thing of Tosti's and another by Lord Henry Somerset that was all the rage. Hailes had heard neither and was delighted with them both, her father-in-law said " Very pretty indeed, my dear," and

she felt it was delightfully romantic to be singing like this to three men in the twilight, in a room that Mary Queen of Scots had dined in, too.

"Let's have something Scots, Bertha," said her husband. She was a little disappointed. The cult of the folk-song had not arisen yet in '89, and she felt that Gilbert's frank liking for the old tunes was a little vulgar, especially before a visitor. However, if he really wanted one . . . besides, there were some with nice English poetry instead of dialect. She began good-naturedly to sing

In the garb of old Gaul, with the fire of old Rome,
From the heath-covered mountains of Scotia we come,

and gave it a very spirited accompaniment.

The old man drowsed. It had been Janet Kennedy's piano, and in the brief year of their marriage he had seen her dark eyes glow between its candles, her slim swift hands, tanned with sea-air, on the keys that had been whiter in '61. Those eyes of hers had fire under the darkness . . . she was half his age when he brought her there as a bride, and one-and-twenty when he laid her in Skares kirkyard. His mind flickered back fifteen years again, to Solange de Méran, the summer twilight he had seen her first, with a moon rising on the silken Loire, herself in a cloud of gossamer white flounces, very serene, with a clear curve of dark hair against either cheek. It was nearly as long as herself when she let it down: and he had carried off the white camellia she wore over one ear—but that was later. And had subsequently fought De Lavarel.

His eyes lit for a moment. Then he sighed. Women, these days, thought crinolines were ugly: but the ladies of his youth had borne them with an air that was

extinct. There was no elegance now: the men were boors, and the women—they smoked and wore men's shirts and ties and collars: they openly admired the plays of Ibsen: they went to the universities—well, there was no harm in a woman being intelligent and well read, but that a lady should desire to earn her living, compete with men in one of the professions . . . and crop her hair. . . .

His son, announcing his engagement, a little anxiously, had declared there was no New Woman about Bertha. She was good and gentle and domesticated—no Women's Rights nonsense about her. She would never think she knew better than her husband, set him right at his own table like Mrs. Traill. She had proved, in fact, a kindly, good-natured lassie. Gilbert, when he had owned she had no dowry, had declared defensively she was not a fine lady, and it was certainly true: she was not. But she was healthy enough to all appearance, with solid heavy coils of flaxen hair, and he agreed politely she had fine eyes. They were large, with thick lashes, but affected him rather unpleasantly, for the surface of them was curiously flat, with a shiny bright opacity like a doll's. But she was clearly very fond of Gilbert. If her mother had been his landlady as a student—well, Mrs. Hadden was a minister's widow, and a gentlewoman might find herself in straits. He had not asked for particulars beyond the manse. Gilbert seemed fond of her too, and sufficiently content with the affection. It was a little odd that Janet Kennedy's son should not have sought a woman with more challenge: it was a somewhat effortless affair. He refused to acknowledge he would have thought better of Gilbert if the latter had chanced more risks to his ease of mind.

His thoughts drifted again to Solange de Méran. Convent-bred, shielded wholly from the world, there was none the less a queer deep wisdom in her, a strength too that roused his to exultation. There was a fierce generosity under her quiet: she never promised easy victory, but the achievement had a quality he had only known otherwise in the stress of danger. They had been friends, too. With Janet there was never that: she was too young. But since he loved the memory of both women, he would not compare them even in his thought. Each held her place, and to-night, with the moon rising, was Solange's, though she had never, in her five-years marriage, set foot in Scotland.

And little Andrée, her sister—she was dead too. She had been a child in pantalettes that night by the Loire, then at sixteen had left the Sacré Cœur and run from her betrothal to come and live with them—and a year later had knelt by his side in Lima, and watched the red candles round her sister's bier. It was Ogilvie who had saved the situation . . . he could see him now, stripped to the waist, in a broken-brimmed sombrero, serving a gun at the San Pedro barricades and swearing in Spanish with a strong Scots accent because the sweat was running into his eyes. It was a rather different Andy Ogilvie to whom he had given away Andrée in church: she was very like Solange in her white mantilla. The sedate little soul she had been: he had been seriously worried over the marriage, she was such a child and Andy mad in love with her, and she taking the whole arrangement as self-possessed and outwardly unexcited as a little silver medal of Our Lady. And then she had looked up one day and said suddenly in her composed little voice, "I am so glad his name is the same as mine," and had Solange in her eyes when

she said it. It was odd to think of Andy grown fat and respectable, a sober general practitioner in Blois. Their daughter must be a grown-up woman now. When he had seen her, in that last year before he was a cripple, she was a child in a round comb and starched white pinafore—shy, but they were good friends before he left. He had regularly sent his niece an *étrenne*, at the New Year and on her *jour de fête*, and she always wrote a sedately polite little letter. But there was more of the good Sisters in it than his wild little Nan: he wondered if she had grown sedate all through—though it was hardly likely in Andy's daughter—and if not how she got on with her old great-aunt, who had forgiven her twelve-years-dead niece, and taken the girl to her when her father died.

He would have been glad enough to look after her himself. But there had been no lady then at Kinnellan, and he was too ill at the time to do anything. There had been no *étrenne* from Uncle James that year, and little Anne Ogilvie had gone to Madame de Saye.

The room was growing dark but for Bertha's candles: she was playing some tinkling thing like running water, and the two young men in one of the seaward windows were talking in low tones about Hailes's new gun. The wind was rising again after the sunset, and drove the young tide harder on the rocks. His drowse grew deeper: he was on the crest of the cliffs on a black horse, and little Anne Ogilvie beside his bridle. Then he saw she rode the chestnut that had killed Janet, and snatched the rein, but she changed to Solange and rode over the cliff, her black hair flying with a silver ribbon in it—a silver ribbon barred with red and gold, so that he cried the old Keith motto after her, "*They have said.*

What say they? Let them say," and heard the rising tide on Catteraw.

The sea was real enough. There was Bertha's voice in it, "The Master is asleep," and he looked up. Taggart was standing by him with the post, and the letter at the top had a French stamp.

CHAPTER IV

"Ma patrie, bien chérie."
Les Adieux de Marie Stuart.

THE train had been a little late at Berwick, and rocked and swayed in pursuit of the lost time. The dusk drew westward out of the Firth of Forth, and Anne Ogilvie, looking out through the carriage window, could see a light or two on the Fife shore. But it was amazingly far from real dark for all that, though the wide Lothian fields paled to the harvest, and the summer now was gone well past the full.

She began to wonder again about Kinnellan. Her memories of Uncle James were reassuring, but she speculated rather apprehensively on the two other members of the family. Uncle James had talked a good deal of "my boy Gilbert," but he was even then at the University, so of course he would be years older than she. Mrs. Gilbert was a good deal more important. She knew of her nothing but that her name was Bertha, and since it sounded German felt rather antagonised, though she had been only a baby when 1870 brought her parents home in a hurry from Guiana. But the name was hardly Mrs. Gilbert's fault: it would be delightful to live in the same house with a woman who even if she was married could not be greatly older than say twenty-five. Uncle James would of course find *un parti convenable* for herself soon: she was glad her husband was likely to be Scots rather than French: it felt much more romantic. But she did not want her marriage to happen yet. After

Grand'tante and grim old Madame Michon her factotum, and the walled garden high above the Loire, the thought of Kinnellan was like all the fairy-tales. It was an adventure itself to travel from London to Edinburgh, with no more escort than the care of the guard. She felt like a wandering princess in Perrault.

Her uncle's account of it stayed in her memory—the sea with a perpetual sound under the cliffs, the strong wind always, ships passing off the shore and the flying gulls, and the tower itself, high on a rock like Amboise, but much smaller, of course. It had been built first for a bride who came out of France in the days when her own Touraine was a Douglas duchy—the grand-daughter of a Scots captain of the Maid's. It was her father, though, who had told her the country rhyme of it—

Kinnellan, standing be the se,
Lairdles sal thy landis be,
Twys be a lady as aince be a king,
And dawis neists in thy chalmers hing.

But he had warned her never to say it to Uncle James, for there was another saying, that as it came for a foreign bride it would go for another, and its inheritor might dread that the lady of the rhyme was her Aunt Solange. She was very glad then that his second marriage, if distressing in her chief hero of romance, had given him a son to secure the succession.

There was a strange sudden hill through the window opposite, stark in the after-colours of the sunset, and pointed tourelles beneath it like Luynes. The train roared into a tunnel, and she looked at her watch : this, then, was Edinburgh. She resumed her hat and veil in a hurry, fastened her jacket, and was busy at the eight buttons of her second glove when they drew out under a castle on a rock. She wondered it was so little

like the pictures, having like all strangers mistaken the Calton Jail, and then they were in a great lighted station, and she began in a panic to think in rapid French. But she sat still in her corner notwithstanding, while her fellow-travellers passed luggage over her ; and immediately the guard was at her elbow.

" Here ye are, mem, and I'm howpin' ye hid a pleisant journey doun. We're weel on time."

She got out, thanking him, and he went on with a look up the platform, " Can ye see the leddy and gentleman that's tae meet ye ? "

She gazed at the hurrying crowd, rather bewildered. The sound of the voices was pitched unfamiliarly, and bothered her, though her own English was fluent enough. But the place cleared quickly, and she stood by the guard conspicuous in her deep French mourning. A man came up the platform towards her, a lady on his arm in a checked ulster. He was looking right and left with keen swift glances, then suddenly caught her eye and seemed to pause, spoke to the lady, and came forward to her, lifting his hat.

" Miss Ogilvie, I think ? I am Gilbert Keith. My wife and I are very glad to see you."

CHAPTER V

" His father has nae mair but he."
Clerk Saunders.

ANNE had been sure she could not go to sleep. The mere fact of being in an hotel was novelty, the unfamiliar food and strange-shaped bread. She was pleased to find she could understand the chambermaid, though the Cockney girl last night had been unintelligible. The oblong pillows were queer, the mattress even harder than in London, all the handles turned wrong way and the tap marked C was the cold one. But she was asleep, for all that, before Bertha, next door, had finished her commentary on her. It was good-natured enough: Bertha was never catty, and the girl's slim distinction had impressed her, while she found her foreignness as exciting as Anne found the taps and pillows.

" Why do you call her Miss Ogilvie ? " she demanded, and Gilbert answered, " We're no relation, you know, though she's father's niece. Her mother was his first wife's younger sister."

" I know," she said. " He told me about that, though I think all the same if she's to live with us it would be kinder-like to call her Cousin Anne. You're as good as cousins. But I mean—she's married, or a widow at least, poor lassie. Your father had no word of that."

He looked surprised. " Great Scott, I never knew," he said. " Oh—you saw her ring, I suppose."

" No, she's not wearing it—it's funny, but I suppose they've different customs there. I meant her weeds."

"Oh, I see. No, that doesn't mean she's a widow. French ladies wear long veils like that for any kind of family mourning."

"Do they really? How funny! But it's very graceful, though it must be an awful humbug in windy weather."

"You'd better break her of it at Kinnellan, then! She'll go over the cliffs if a squall catches her on the path with all that sail spread! I don't like to see a young girl in all that crape."

"It does seem an awful lot for just a great-aunt, but her hat's real nice—I like the way the bows are put on at the side."

"She seems a quiet little thing at all events. She'd be rather taking if she had more colour."

"She's not what you'd call pretty, certainly. But there's something about her—she looks real distinguished. And that's a lovely jacket she has on—the cloth's as fine, and it fits her like her skin. Did you see the buttons?"

"Can't say I did. She had a neat pair of shoes, though, if they didn't look much like the Kinnellan rocks." He was wondering, though for some reason he did not say so, why Miss Ogilvie looked better near at hand than at a distance: the reverse was common enough, but this was unusual. He did not remark on the phenomenon: it would mean a detailed explanation, and he was sleepy, so he said to his wife as he turned over, "You've done your shopping, haven't you? In that case we'll have time to take her to the Castle and perhaps Holyrood before the train goes."

"She'll like that. You remember when we were on our honeymoon, the fat wee man who took us . . ." But Gilbert had finished turning over.

He did not sleep as soon as his wife imagined, though he had ceased to think about Anne Ogilvie. It was long since he had been further from Kinnellan than an occasional day of business in Aberdeen, and now the restless blood in him was chafing. Kinnellan, certainly, was more to him than anything in the world : the sense of it was bred in that very blood for generations : he had been born when his father turned home from adventuring, begotten for love of Kinnellan as much as a woman, and nurtured avowedly for its inheritance. James Keith's late-wakened passion for the place had been more fervent for its very lateness.

Since the elder man was neither fool nor tyrant, he would not have chosen to tie down his son. Moneyless as he was, for he had come home with richer eyes than hands, he had done his best to give the boy a training. Gilbert must necessarily be in occupation something not very different from a farmer : but Keith of Kinnellan must be able to hold his own with men born equally. He had succeeded in so far as that Gilbert, however awkward he might feel, would never look it ; and failed in that the younger man felt awkward enough with unfamiliar equals, however little he revealed of it. The boy was to travel when he left the University : he had already spent a holiday or two in London, the most of a long vacation in Paris and the Low Countries with his father. Then a young horse came down, and James Keith was a cripple : Gilbert came home from his second year at the University, and took charge. It cost him something : he had been passionate to see the world. But since Kinnellan was there and his father helpless, he settled into the job with a grim patience. At the outset he had to fight through three bad years, and in the second a bank smash had dipped them

heavily. War with ill-luck and the lean soil and furious winds called up the fighting blood in him: he was seldom unhappy. He had formed a theory to live by and held it dourly; and if the sight of ships, southbound from Aberdeen, the whoop and rush of the London express across his fields, roused longing, he forced it down and acted on the theory, until he came to feel by it again.

James Keith, who understood much, said very little. He understood the rebellion rather than the theory, but Kinnellan must be served, and there was only Gilbert. The marriage with Bertha Hadden was rather a shock. It hurt his arrogant pride in the boy, for though he tried to put it down to chivalry, he had a horrible doubt there might be that in Gilbert which found itself more at ease with an inferior.

He was right in it, but not entirely just. The chivalry was there too: if it comforted Gilbert, resenting his poverty and inward awkwardness, to play Cophetua where alone it was possible, there was a good deal of generous desire to repay his debt to Mrs. Hadden's kindness in nursing him through a serious bout of typhoid, by fulfilling responsibilities he seemed to have incurred for her daughter's happiness . . . and a good deal of the theory as well. And also, he had looked up long enough to his father's tolerant and large experience for Bertha's awe at his own to come gratefully. The love of a human being may be more profound when like the love of God it has no illusions: but few people after all dare to desire that, craving rather a love for those qualities they doubt.

It had worked surprisingly well, too, on the whole. He could not but be aware that by his marriage he had broadened the faint bar between him and those natur-

ally equal: but the unacknowledged awareness only made him resolute to make a defiant success of the match he had chosen. And the last few years had steadied Kinnellan's finances, paid off the wadset on the best farm: he tasted victory. To-night if the sound of trains disturbed more than his sleep, it did not last. Only in his dreams he found his new-won haystacks were covered with black crape veils, and swore at his grieve for choosing stuff so little waterproof.

CHAPTER VI

"And then they rode to the dykes. . . And the sea beat upon the one side of the walls."

La Morte Darthur.

THE sightseeing was duly performed, on a fine clear morning. Gilbert, like most of his countrymen, had a strong sense of the past, and was pleased by the girl's quiet but visible enthusiasm. Most of her childhood had been spent in Blois, and that steep fierce town has much kinship with old Edinburgh. Excitement and the crisp air had given her colour: her English, soft and lower-pitched than Bertha's, was that of a Scots gentlewoman in the main, with a faint foreign tinge upon the accent: now and then she had to hunt for a word, for she had not spoken it since her father's death. Gilbert, who had learnt French and Spanish from his father, was able easily to help her out. He had been shy of displaying an accent frankly Caledonian, but Bertha was proud to show off her man's accomplishments.

"You'll have to talk French together, you two," she said. "It'll keep you from forgetting it, Miss Ogilvie."

Anne laughed, a pretty, silent little laugh. "I'm not likely to forget it now, I think! But I should be glad to speak it sometimes, though I am a Scotswoman really, you know."

"I hope you'll not be missing the fine French ways at Kinnellan," said Bertha a little anxiously, with a look at the stranger's black silk gown.

The girl turned, smiling, with a bow that was as

French as Mary Stuart. " You make me sure I shall miss no kindness, Mrs. Keith."

Bertha patted her arm, but the bow had scared her a little. She was not easily made shy, however: it was one of the reasons why Gilbert had found it so pleasantly simple an affair to marry her.

She said, " Don't you think, Miss Ogilvie, we might call cousins? If we are going to live together it would be more friendly-like. And Gilbert is nearly your cousin after all."

The girl made her little foreign bow again. " Indeed, you are very kind, my cousin. It shall be as you say." The slight French accent had intensified.

Gilbert interposed, smiling. " Bertha is right. But I have a still better claim to the privilege, don't you think? "

She looked up, not quite as far as his eyes, and left Bertha to answer, but she did not demur, and he had a certain sense of satisfaction at having thus defined their relationship.

The journey to Stonehaven is not long. He found the two ladies corner seats on the right side, and sat by Anne to show her points of interest, chaff her, passing the Castle, for her confessed mistake about the Calton Jail, enjoy her surprise over the great Forth Bridge. As she watched the stoop and snatch of the huge girders, the ships like toys far down on the bright sea, he decided that it was the delicacy of the surface mouldings that gave her face charm. She had inherited her father's high Scots cheekbones, and the wide-apart dark eyes were not large enough, the mouth too large, for the current canon. Bertha would never need to envy her. Perhaps her best point, after her air of

breeding, was the mass of dark bright hair, and her hands were beautiful.

As they left the sea she turned to him again, with questions of towns that had been names to her. He was pleased to find that, unlike the English people he had met, she knew the meaning of the Highland Line, and on which side of it was the city of Aberdeen. After Dundee the train ran for long by the coast, and a rising tide was blown by the south wind. It was strange to think that, except as a baby in arms, she had never seen the sea until two days ago.

Then came Stonehaven, and they changed and waited for a local train, that followed the express along the cliffs. Anne had lost her colour. She was realising now that the journey, as pleasant as it had been, was the end of France. She must live in a new country, among strangers, and though she had always called herself a Scotswoman, Scotland seemed suddenly foreign enough. She looked with a sort of appeal, the stronger for its unconsciousness, at her companions. Bertha smiled back to her with a vague kindness, but it was from Gilbert's graver eyes that she took more comfort. It seemed that he understood her sudden loneliness: then she grew afraid lest he should think her unappreciative, and asked a hasty question about Muchalls. The train stopped there, and he reached down her dressing-bag. In five minutes she was beside him in a tall "machine," and the groom was swinging her trunks into a cart.

The high flat land was vast in the beginning of a sunset. Far up the wind, a half-moon, pale yet, soared over darkening sea. There were three ships nearly out on the horizon, and a steady distant murmur of onshore waves.

Their road led back along the way that they had come, and then struck seaward, passing through a hollow. The tall grey in the shafts bowled them along it at a steady pace, and Gilbert pointed ahead as they ascended.

" Kinnellan," he said.

A tower rose from the cliffs, and the level light made it golden between the green and the dark blue. They went down again by a steep green glen and lost it : the road sank steadily, and Anne found herself with the sea ahead and close, and on her right a vast wall of dark rock. They turned below it, and she faced cliffs again : a berg of them was moored by a low pebble-ridge against a precipice sheer as its own. The tower was above, its crow-stepped roof still catching the sun's brightness with a flag like a jewel high on a tourelle. Then they were driving into the mouth of a gate. There was a steep strait passage, arched with masonry : the wheels and the grey's hoofs made fantastic echoes. A lad came to the horse's head from what seemed a stable-yard, and Keith helped her down at the foot of a stone stair. They mounted and came out under the tower.

It rose from green turf that ran to the edge of the cliff. Gilbert turned to his guest in the doorway, baring his head. " Entrez Kinnellan, ma cousine. Vous êtes la bienvenue." He flushed a little, but it was easier to say in French. She did not smile at the blunder of the idiom, but gave him a strange look like a wondering child's, and obeyed. The still air of the hall was dark and cold.

Uncle James was older than she had remembered him, but the kindly eyes were unchanged. To see him was like being once more in France, and the tears rose, for he had brought back her father very vividly. Her

manners mastered them, and Bertha carried her off to her own room, by a queer complicated route down a long gallery, into a drawing-room with lamps and out again, up a dark stair that twisted between stone walls.

It was not until the good-nights had been got over that she had leisure to study her quarters in the candle-light. Bertha had not attempted restoration: the appointments of the place were of 1820—a carpet of faded roses, mahogany dulled a little by sea air, a tent-bed with high curved hangings of green and ivory. The windows were high and small, in six-foot recesses: she undid the shutters of the nearer one, pushing its arm-thick bar into the stone, and looked on a formal garden with a well, and a sweet-pea trellis showing in the moonlight. The scent rose up to her through the salt keen air. The other looked down the coast to the moon itself, bright silver now. She opened it and leaned out, and found the sea two hundred feet below her: the waves crawled inward between walls of rock. She had heard them continually since her arrival, but this was the first time she had stood to watch them: the moon had moved well inland before she wearied, and she slept with the steady sound filling her dreams.

CHAPTER VII

"A sufficient space for ladies' exercise."
Life of Jane Austen.

BREAKFAST was a formidable affair to a girl bred in France. She had seen a London one of greasy bacon, the terrific repertory of an Edinburgh hotel, and knew what to expect, including the coffee, which domestically was her hostess's weak point. She discovered that the other two were drinking tea, and decided that it would be better for everyone to accustom herself to share their teapot; and parrying Bertha's hospitality as well as she might, consented to marmalade with her "soft biscuit." The room, with its vaulted roof, interested her. So for another reason did Bertha's gown, a bright blue cashmere with a linen collar that had probably been fresher the day before.

Gilbert rose and gave her a very friendly greeting, but then was occupied with the morning mail. Bertha, concerned with the bi-weekly visit of the butcher, was also rather meditative, and so she watched him, and decided she had been right in liking him. He seemed to be kindly and reliable, with a certain fighting line in the turn of the jaw. The clothes of the day would have disguised Adonis, but the aged Harris tweed that he was wearing had set with use to his strong comely body, and she liked the finished movements of his hands.

Bertha, as they rose, suggested that Gilbert should show their guest the garden. He looked instinctively for the high-heeled shoes, but she had on a stronger pair

than yesterday, though they clung to the arch of a slender springing instep. He approved them, and her black and white striped cotton gown, with its plain housemaid skirt and linen collar, but his shyness returned as he found himself alone with her, and reached for a battered cap from the rack in the hall.

The morning was clear. bright wind, with a brilliant sky. Kinnellan took the sun, grim but still kindly, the lichen like yellow gold on the ancient stonework. Far down, in a thunderous rhythm, they could hear the sea. The garden sloped to the south, with a wing for shelter, ending at the rim of the cliff in an ancient wall. It was for usefulness as well as pleasure, for the coloured borders neighboured rows of vegetables : but there was close green turf in the centre of it, about a stone-flagged space with a carved well-head.

He said apologetically, " It's a windy spot. We can't grow anything taller than those rose-trees. You see the slant of the bushes as it is. Bertha came out one day not very long ago to find the bleaching blowing out to sea, and is still mourning the loss of her best table-cloth."

She answered his smile. " But it is quiet here. One does not feel the wind."

He pointed to the swaying berry-bushes. " You'll feel it all right over there. . . . By the way, Cousin Anne, I wouldn't go near that wall if I were you. Don't try to reach that footway under the loopholes. It's part of the old defence-works, and it's not safe."

" I will remember, Cousin Gilbert."

" I'm going to have it masoned up and mortared, but Bertha wants the berries gathered first. It was a gale last spring that weakened it. I'd no idea it was so bad till a chunk went overboard in a May storm. . . .

Hello!" He stooped and picked up a small fuzzy kitten, put it on his coat sleeve and held it out to her. "May I present the Lady Tabitha?" Her ladyship ran up the sleeve, sat on his shoulder, and yawned blandly at the world with a curled pink tongue, then tried to sharpen her claws upon his neck.

He picked her off. "C'wa oot o' that, ye wee deevilock! Can you speak Scots, Cousin Anne?"

She held her hands out for the kitten, that stretched a tentative paw to her one ring. "Not very well. Father taught me to sing the old songs and to read Burns, but Burns's Scots won't be the same as yours, I suppose?"

"No, it's south-western. My mother was of his countryside, or pretty near it—he was a Kyle man, and she came from Carrick. So I've a certain liking for the tongue itself, apart from what the man made out of it."

"She used to speak it?"

"I suppose she could—she sang it, I know. But I was six weeks old when she was killed. That's a heron going down the wind, Cousin Anne. Can you see him—yonder?"

She turned, gazing under her hand into the light. The rich keen air had given her more colour, and stirred the small dark curls at the nape of her neck. Her mourning black and white seemed out of the picture.

As they went on her eyes came on the well-curb. "Monsieur your ancestor was a man of cheerful tastes, my cousin!"

He followed the glance. "Oh, that? The skull and cross-bones? They're the arms of the Lady Kinnellan who built the well-head—you see they're on a lozenge. You'll find her husband's on the other side. She was

a Moir of Scotstown. It's a cheerful coat, especially with their motto . . ." Bertha called from the house just then, and he turned. "I must go to my father. Will you come in, or would you rather stay here? Bertha will be out presently, I fancy."

"I'll stay here, if I may. It's pleasant in the sun. Mademoiselle Tabitha will keep me company."

"Very well." He scratched the little striped beast's head, and went. When he turned to look back from the door she was sitting on the well-curb, with it curled in a furry ball upon her knee.

Leaving his father's room, a little later, he wondered if she were still in the garden, and looked from the gallery window as he passed. She was no longer on the well-head, and the paths between the swaying flowers were empty. He was turning away when his eye caught the old wall, and he checked abruptly. It rose from a steep green slope, high as a cottage, and Anne stood on the broken cope of it, her black and white skirts flapping in the wind. As he stared a blob of the wall gave way beside her, and he heard it crash and rattle on the cliff. She held her hands out, balancing desperately, and as he plunged three steps at once down the steep stair he could still see the pallor of her face.

He raced through the garden, seeing as he ran how precariously she was placed. His prohibition had understated the case as he knew it, and the high wall was worse even than he knew. He wondered what the devil had taken her—mere manners, surely, ought to have kept her away after what he had said—but was relieved to see she had sufficient sense to keep her head up, and her eyes on anything but the space under the wall.

He hailed from the path : " Look at the flag on the tower, and keep on looking at it ! Don't take your eyes away until I tell you." He had reviewed the situation as he ran. Eight feet above the level of the garden was a ledge that had been the pathway of a rampart. Above it rose a seven-foot parapet, screening from archery on the mainland opposite. The ledge had no access now, but could be climbed, and below it the thick wall was secure enough. He could reach it easily, but to gain Anne's level was another matter, for the thinner parapet, weakened with loopholes, was very shaky, and the addition of his weight to hers would probably mean a fall of fifteen feet in a shower of stones, if they escaped going clear over the cliff.

He got to the ledge and called, " Don't look down till you jump. I'm just beneath you on the footway, but I can't come any higher. When I count three, jump down to me, and I'll catch you." It was risky, but might work if she kept her head.

She called down " Yes," and he dropped to one knee on the ledge and held his arms out, then shouted slowly, " Ready ? One—two—three."

She was small and light, but the drop was a good long one. He did succeed in checking her descent, but its impetus nearly sent both into the garden, and even as he clutched and threw himself back the high wall swayed. The take-off of her leap had loosed the unsteady cope-stone, and the chunk she had stood on lurched out and went down the cliff with a noise like thunder.

The rattle of the loose stones turned Gilbert sick : he imagined a black-and-white dress going down among them. But there was no time for sentiments of peril : they were insecurely balanced as it was, though it

occurred to him that if she had clung to his coat as the stones fell, he had not heard her give any sort of a cry.

He said at once, " You're safe. Only keep steady. I'll lower you from here by the arm, and you won't have to drop more than a few inches." She was still dead white, but she smiled as he showed her how to grip his wrist above his own hold on hers, and swung off unhesitatingly when he gave the word.

" Let go," he said. She went, and he dropped beside her. She staggered against the wall and put a hand on it. Now that she was quite safe, he had time for anger, and it came in a cold fury that edged his voice.

" How did you get up there ? " was all he said. She was shivering, on the verge of hysterics, but the tone steadied her to face him. Her shivering ceased.

" I know you told me not to. I am sorry. But the kitten—you know how they climb when they are small, and can't get down again. She was mewing there, so frightened. I couldn't climb up under her, and she wouldn't jump, and when I got to the top and was almost within reach of her, she got on to a stone that turned, and . . ." She put her hands over her eyes. " I nearly went then, too. I am afraid in high places."

He looked down at her : he was still angry enough, but there was a different colour in his anger. The position would have taxed his own cliff-bred nerves : and she was " afraid in high places." But she had not screamed, and had followed his orders without hesitation.

He said, less harshly, " Why did you not call for me to fetch the beast ? You might have been killed. You could not have kept your balance there much longer."

Her head went up. " You were not there and I was. Was I to make you risk it because I was afraid ? "

He looked at her slowly, with the beginning of a smile "I see your point. Only I happen to be a man, you know. And—I do not want to sound inhospitable, but if my guest should break her neck more or less on my doorstep, don't you think it is rather unpleasant for her host?"

The punishment was even cruelly effective. She flushed vividly and turned away, but her lip shook, and the last of his anger vanished.

"Cousin Anne!"

She halted. "I . . . please, I am sorry. I must go."

"Forgive what I said. I was angry. Because . . . well, you gave me a pretty thorough scare, you know."

Her face puckered in a quaint little grimace. "You could not be more scared, I think, than I was. But you will not have to—order me"—the dark eyes lifted, and there was mischief in them—"to keep away from your cliffs any more. To have to wait again with that space behind me. . . ." Her shudder was not all of it in jest, and he saw her whiten at the memory.

He said slowly, "I shall not ask you"—he put faint stress on the verb—"to avoid the cliffs. In fact—you will think me pretty brutal, I'm afraid, but you are going to walk round the edge of them with me, just now." She looked up with sheer terror in her eyes, but he went on, "Oh, on my arm if you like. You are quite safe. But you must, or you will always be afraid of them now."

She looked up and nodded. "You are right, Cousin Gilbert. No, I will not take your arm, thank you." And she insisted, too, on being next the edge. She was white enough, but talked gallantly all the time, asking him questions of the castle's history.

CHAPTER VIII

"How pleasant it is . . . to dwell together in unity."
The Songs of Degrees.

MID-AUGUST brought the ripening of the barley, and the oats followed hard thereafter, in a harvest unusually promising. Gilbert, short-handed, worked as hard in the fields as any of his men, and Anne was surprised and even a little shocked when for the first time she met him coming up from the stable-yard in a flannel shirt and ancient riding-breeches, his sleeves rolled from tanned arms and a silk handkerchief about his throat. But she was much less shocked than Bertha would have expected: his swarthy leanness made a very personable gipsy—Janet Kennedy in fact had a distant strain of the Faas in her, from some wild marriage of an ancestor: and it was only the fear of horrifying Bertha that kept her from offering to help herself. The escapade of the kitten had established between them a sort of silent friendliness, that showed, however, no signs of growing to an intimacy, for he was too busy to see much of her in the daytime, and too tired of an evening to be conversational.

But he had grown to like having her about, and forgotten, or remembered with amusement, the resentful horror he had felt—though not expressed—at the prospect of her coming to Kinnellan. In a week, however, she had taken her own place. She shared Bertha's piano of an evening, and though her voice was small it was sweet in quality, with upper notes that fluted like a blackbird's. Her songs were aged ballads of the

'sixties, that gave his father pleasure, the Scots ones Andy Ogilvie had taught her, or old French chansons, gay and melancholy, with refrains that had no meaning in themselves, but haunted none the less like their frail tunes. He liked them at the late dusk, after dinner, with the broad harvest moon south down the cliffs, and his father sitting in the high-backed chair. And she did not chatter. She talked, indeed, very little at any time, though when she did he found that since their day in Edinburgh he had lost the sense of awkwardness with a stranger. Then he had seemed unembarrassed by sheer good manners, but now she was as naturally part of Kinnellan as Bertha or his old grey terrier.

If Gilbert accepted, the other two were frankly fond of her. To the old man she brought back days of his strength. She was like her mother and aunt, and came of their world, fine, brave, fastidious: the set of her head, her hands dealing the cards, were Solange de Méran's. He talked to her night by night of France and Italy and wild Spanish-American republics, the farce and tragedy of revolution, or farther back, set her to Scottish history, the tangle of fierce swift-handed hates and loyalties, the incredible campaigns of the great Montrose, or Claverse his kinsman, dead in victorious battle, when the silver bullet put an end to skill and courage and scornful beauty. She would listen above the abandoned cards on the green cloth, and Gilbert, stirred by the ring in the old voice, looked up from drowsing, to find familiar tales had come alive again, as he saw them mirrored in one to whom they were new.

Bertha was fonder of her than the men. To them it was natural enough that a woman's charm should be vaguely exotic: and if her breeding and sex made her think of things that were foreign to their minds, she

thought of them none the less in their own language. But to Bertha she was entirely wonderful. Her first warm impulse to the white-faced lonely girl in her heavy crape tided her through a shyness half-resentful when she came on foreign niceties of habit, and she was quick to realise, surprised a little, that Anne had no "superior" airs about them, taking for granted her dainty toilet-gear and fine body-linen. The stranger's faith, too, was a fascinating if rather shocking mystery. Anne's ebony beads on the corner of her dressing-table, the silver crucifix above her bed, were half a scandal, half a romance coloured with Mary Stuart. Anne was, in short, a good deal of a fairy-tale, and the kind sentimental soul frankly adored her.

She had been rather lonely at Kinnellan. The talk of the men was apt to go over her head, and though James had tried to teach her chess and piquet, she made heavy weather of it, and he gave it up. The neighbours had duly called when she came as a bride, but the women were all distant geographically, and a little inclined to some remoteness otherwise. In Scotland one can afford, in social intercourse, a Chaucerian indifference to class distinctions, for reasons that are partly poverty and partly those that ruled Chaucer's own world. There is no country where to rise from the ranks is in practice easier or more successful, but Bertha had not succeeded very well—less well, perhaps, than a country-bred woman might: so she felt, and was, a little alien in most local drawing-rooms. It was not pointed enough to have hurt badly, but she felt, half-consciously, that to be Mrs. Gilbert Keith of Kinnellan was more savoury at Kinnellan than abroad, and was glad to need no wariness with the newcomer.

Anne on her part was settling into place. Her

childish love for her uncle had revived. He linked her with familiar France again, and beyond that, through her father and her mother, to dear and adventurous dreams : if she herself stood for romance to Bertha, the old man filled that place in turn for her. For the rest, the place itself was an enchantment, the defiant garden and the square grey tower, the high thrust of the cliffs she was losing fear of, the wind and the *kui-kui* of the gulls. She would take her lace-pillow out to the well-head and watch the break of the sea on Catteraw till she knew the tides as well as Gilbert's self. There was only one thing in the place that troubled her : it took her long to get used to the twisted stair, and though she ceased in time to feel her way she wondered how Gilbert could run so lightly down it, even in spurs.

CHAPTER IX

" To see a fine lady upon a white horse."
Nursery Rhyme.

THE harvest holidays were at an end, and the school at Skares due to re-open again. So it was natural that the schoolmistress should come to Kinnellan to enlist the laird's good offices for a cottar's son desirous of passing on to Stonehaven Academy. The minister, who had taught him Greek and Latin, might have done it himself, to be sure ; but he farmed his own glebe and was busy with the last of the oats, so was thankful enough when Miss Duncan volunteered.

Kinnellan received her very graciously. It was not much he could do, but there was a local bursary, ten pounds or so, that would help to make up for the loss of the laddie's wages, and if the boy was as well-doing as Dr. Dishart declared him, he was not to miss his chance. Kinnellan's influence should go for his bursary, and if further help were needed, they could count on it : " But my son will see to that for you, Miss Duncan." Unluckily, the young laird was from home.

Miss Duncan had faced her embassy boldly enough, but though the old man's stately courtesy was meant to be reassuring, its effect on her was rather opposite. Few men made Isa Duncan easily abashed, but her present host chilled her somehow, for all his graciousness. She was glad when Bertha appeared and gave her tea. There were only three cups on the old silver tray, and she counted them with a pang for lost opportunity. But Mrs. Keith's air of patronage stiffened

her back, and she watched her, under their chatter, with contempt. A pasty thing . . . how the like of Gilbert Keith had come to marry her passed comprehension ! And now she was a laird's lady, set her up ! And Gilbert Keith himself was in Stonehaven. She declined a second piece of sponge-cake, and got away. To finish the thing, it was coming on to rain, and she was wearing the hat with the red ribbons.

She remembered that, and her colour rose with vexation. Putting it on at the glass on her chest-of-drawers, she had planned a very different interview. Since the little episode beside the dyke, Gilbert Keith had lifted his cap to her in passing : once in the post-office he had made some remark about the weather . . . the old man's voice had the intonations of his son's. But in church, where she sat each week squarely in front of him, he might have been unaware of her existence, and the fact that most young men in the church were otherwise was proving inadequate as compensation. He *should* be aware, if she won half a chance.

What was to happen then she would not consider. She had no intention of letting him bring her trouble, and since Bertha existed she could not, obviously, plan a marriage, though she felt she could achieve even that if Keith were free. If he had shown himself, even slightly, to admire her, it is more than probable she would never have thought of him : but with half the young men in the parish buying sweets for her, that the most desirable should take no notice was past endurance. Also, she had a fierce dislike of Mrs. Keith, and the latter, who disapproved of her with vigour, had done her best to put her in her place. To have Gilbert Keith dangling at her skirt tails would be double triumph—treble, indeed, for of late she was growing angry with himself.

She twirled her umbrella viciously as she climbed the green glen. The hollow sound of the sea that mounted through it promised a dirty night, but the shower was ending, so she put the umbrella down and changed hands with the skirt of her best crimson cashmere. There was the beat of hoofs on the road ahead of her, and two riders came round the curve of it at a trot. She recognised the one as Gilbert Keith, and the other, to her surprise, was a strange lady. She remembered then Kinnellan's niece from France: she had heard like all the parish of her arrival, and shared the public disappointment when she was not in the Keith pew on Sunday, and—with a resentful edge—the disapproval when it was known that Keith's own absence was explained by his taking his guest to Mass in Stonehaven.

During her visit she had forgotten Miss Ogilvie: but she looked now at her rather than Keith, and sniffed with more scorn than she would have felt had the stranger been on foot. The girl was a wisp of a thing in her tight habit—not even pretty. There was nothing to fear from her. She took her in at a glance, as she stood from the narrow track to make way for them. Keith lifted his hat to acknowledge the courtesy, and then she saw that he had recognised her, and made a little gesture of arrest. He checked his horse. This was better than nothing, and she smiled up sideways, and gave him a good view of her eyelashes.

"Can I speak to you for a minute, Mr. Keith?"

He was off his horse at once. Anne turned in the saddle, and seeing him dismounted, reined and came back. He named the girls to each other, and Anne bowed: Isa Duncan had to look up at her, and resented it. But she turned to Gilbert and told him of Jamie

Thomson and the bursary, showing a pretty interest in the lad, a compassionate anxiety lest he should be hindered in a career that might very likely end in a manse of his own. She had not forgotten Keith's past admiration for the achievements of other cottar lads.

Of course he was ready to help : he knew the laddie, and his parents were decent steady folk, with a long family. The boy himself was plucky and intelligent, must have his chance of school and university : there was not much now required for the Academy, and later, if he did well, the Bursary Competition would see him to Aberdeen, and if his luck in it should prove inadequate, there would be ways of help with clothes and books, a bag of meal to aid his winter provender. The two talked eagerly, and Anne looked smiling down at them : the Bursary Comp. was a new phenomenon, but she understood the affair as an English-bred girl of that day would not have done. She liked the schoolmistress's enthusiasm, and Gilbert's obvious readiness to share it gave her a little sense of warm approval. He was kind and generous, like Uncle James. . . .

Isa Duncan had made the most of their arrangements. He had promised to see Dr. Dishart and the lad's father : there was not much else that could be done just now. The rain was beginning again, and he looked at the sky.

" I mustn't keep you in the wet, Miss Duncan. But I don't think I can do any more at present, can I ? If I can, please let me know at once."

There was no excuse she could find for talking further, so she thanked him and half turned away, pausing to watch him swing into the saddle. How differently he sat a horse from Willie Sutherland, who had offered to make her mistress of the Mains. She

watched him rein his horse beside his cousin's, and the two of them went off together talking, indifferent to Isa Duncan on the path. She was as good any day as that French quyne, and Keith looked at her as if she were dirt under his feet—in which, as a matter of fact, she was quite wrong, for he was speaking of her to Anne with approbation; and Anne, as she listened, was wondering why the girl's parting glance at her should suddenly have seemed almost vindictive, and concluded that she was probably annoyed to have been kept there talking till it rained.

CHAPTER X

" Sept, huit, neuf,
Mes souliers sont neufs.
Dix, onze, douze,
Leurs talons sont rouges."

Nursery Rhyme.

THE storms of Michaelmas came late that year, but the more viciously for the delay. The old tower seemed to crouch in the screaming gusts, and they could see the spray of the high tides leap the cliff's height and pause there spectrally, to fall and drive like shot at the lower windows. The flag blew away from the tower in one fierce squall, and Bertha and Anne, below in the sheltered garden, saw it whirl down the wind far out to seaward.

When the gales were past, October came clear and coloured, with frost at nights and a brilliancy of stars. There was a rich and generous autumn sunlight, the wind blew from the land with the smell of leaves in it, and seaweed dried on the shore as the tide ebbed. Anne drifted on the days in a grave contentment. She was browner now than she had been in Edinburgh, there was more colour in her lips, and she crooned to herself like a child over her sewing—a child's song often enough, *Au clair de la lune* or *Il était un' bergère.* Her uncle and Bertha noted the change and were proud of it, and Gilbert, meeting her on the cliff paths—Bertha loved walking less than she professed to do—approved the spring in her step, and when he had time took her riding, and noticed her upright seat and her light hands. He had bought a neat bay gelding at Saint Luke's

Fair, who carried a side-saddle to admiration, and though it was long since Anne had been on a horse, she had not forgotten yet her father's lessons.

When the neighbours called in due course she was approved, and when she and Bertha made a solemn round in return, in the elderly landau that smelt strongly of mould and was so rickety Gilbert was thankful to see them home safe. Archie Hailes had taken to coming with some frequency, ostensibly for epee bouts with his younger host, but Bertha had theories upon the subject, though she kept them to herself with unwonted tact. She did one day just mention them to Gilbert, but his answer was " Nonsense ! He's just a lad—and she's a child," so curtly that she abandoned the point with a little deprecating giggle.

But since Hailes was heir to a very tolerable small estate, and a likeable young fellow to the bargain, she saw that her embroidery, and consequently Anne's lace-pillow, attended the epee practice in the gallery. In that, at least, she had little difficulty, for Anne loved to watch the quick play of the blades, leaning forward with kindling eyes while her bobbins rested, and followed the longer phrases breathlessly.

Gilbert noticed her interest, pleased by it, and chaffed her. " You ought to have been a boy, Cousin Anne. Or twins, perhaps—yes, twins would have been better, for then you would still be able to make lace with the girl half, while the other took me on with the epee."

She laughed, and flipped a bobbin with one finger. " So I'm condemned to petticoats for ever, just for the sake of a yard or two of lace ! "

" I thought you liked making it, though it looks an awesome affair to my ignorance." He pointed to the twenty couple of bobbins that were dancing rhythmic-

ally under her hands. " What happens if you go and drop the wrong one ? "

" What happens if you miss your opponent's blade ? It's no more complicated than fencing—indeed it's less, for I have my pattern all pricked out on paper, and you have yours to make up as you go along." The bobbins slowed. " I suppose that's the difference between men and women. . . ."

" Would you rather be a boy, Cousin Anne ? "

She looked up and wrinkled her brow a little. He was standing over her with his hand on the knob of a shutter, and Bertha laughed at them both with kindly derision.

" Anne'll find that being a woman's not so bad," she said. " And fine she knows it would be a real disappointment to one we'll not mention if she wasn't. I'm naming no names, lassie ! " she added as Anne grew pink, and bent again over the tossing bobbins.

Gilbert frowned, and also ignored the implication. " You're as well as you are, Cousin Anne."

Bertha giggled. " That's as near a compliment as you'll get out of Gilbert ! But there's other folk are freer in the tongue—and not old married men, I'm thinking, either ! "

Anne's colour rose to her ears, and she did not smile. Gilbert said hurriedly, " Would you like to learn to fence, Cousin Anne ? "

His wife exploded. " That would be a joke, now ! Is it the Gordons she'd be 'listing in, or the Fusiliers ? "

Anne had looked up quickly with her lips parted, but at Bertha's speech she smiled obediently as at a jest. He understood, and continued, " Oh, I mean it. Ladies do fence, I know, though I've never seen one. You can't use the epee, of course—it's too heavy for one thing,

and there'd be a risk for you in the blow of the blade. But I'll teach you to handle the foil if you would like it. It's as good an exercise as you could find, and the roads will not be fit for you much longer."

Her eyes were glowing. "You are kind, Cousin Gilbert. I should love it—if you are sure that it won't bother you?"

He laughed. "Don't fash yourself for that, child! Would you like a lesson now?" He took a foil from the rack, tossed it at arm's-length, and caught the hilt as it fell with a swift free movement.

She let the bobbins go, and got up at once, but he drew back suddenly. "I forgot your petticoats! If you try to lunge in that skirt, you'll break your neck. You must have proper kit of some kind."

"You're surely not to put her into breeches, Gilbert!"

"I don't think that's necessary. The right thing, I believe, is a short black skirt."

"I can make that, quite easily," said Anne. "I've got some satin."

"You'll want a proper jacket, too, before you can fight. Can you copy mine? You must have it, for protection." The pair of them were as eager as two children.

"Oh, yes. I can get drill in Stonehaven, if you'll let me have Admiral to-morrow."

"There's no hurry. Your garibaldi will do till you are ready to fight. But you must have some kind of skirt that you can move in."

They teased her roundly after dinner, for she sat close under the lamp, sewing black satin, and Bertha professed to be shocked by its brevity, and had much to say of Highlanders in kilts. The men were amused by her enthusiasm, but pleased enough, though they

both discovered that they missed her singing. When Gilbert next day came home to the house at dusk she was back at her lace-pillow by the drawing-room fire, and looked up eagerly, though without question.

He put a splashed boot on the fender-stool. "Well, Cousin Anne, are you ready for your lesson?"

Her eyes were smiling and eager, like a child's. "You aren't too tired?"

"For that tremendous exertion?" He laughed down at her. "I shouldn't mind a cup of tea and a change, though, before we begin. It's a filthy forenight outside—raining 'haill watter.' The wind's going north, too—I doubt we're in for snow."

"You must go and change at once," she said reprovingly, and put her fingers on a strip of suspicious darkness down his sleeve. "You're *soaked!*" she declared. "Do you mean to say you had no overcoat?"

"I hadn't. But for any sake, don't tell Bertha!" He laughed at her like a schoolboy caught in mischief, and she shook her head at him as he swung-to the door, and pinning a ribbon tight across her bobbins, covered the pillow and went upstairs in turn.

He was wet to the skin, and the change took a little time. Anne's head had been against a brocade curtain, and he wondered how she would look if she wore colours. She was too live and vivid for that black. A taking child. . . . He recalled what Bertha had said about Archie Hailes, and frowned into the glass as he settled his tie. A good lad, certainly, but—oh, Anne was young. There was plenty of time before she thought of that.

She looked young enough, at least, when she entered the drawing-room, still all in black, though the famous

skirt below her tight wool jersey showed enough silk stocking to have shocked Bertha badly on anyone else. After experiment she had left off her formidable stays, and her body was as elastic as a boy's as she crossed the room. Her eyes were a little shy as she faced Gilbert. " Will this do ? " she said.

" First rate," he answered heartily, and carefully did not look at the silk stockings. But she drank her tea with her chair drawn close to the table.

The lamps were lit in the gallery, and Bertha put a shawl on her shoulders and followed them. Gilbert took down a foil.

" You see the curve of the hilt ? You must hold it *so*. . . . The dickens ! How can you fight in those high heels ? You'll put your ankle out first time you lunge."

" I'm sorry," she said meekly. " I didn't think. . . . I'll take them off," and the offending slippers flew to the wall with a bright flash apiece from the silver buckles. He looked down at the slim arched feet : they were unconscionably tiny, somehow.

" Won't you hurt yourself ? "

" Not a bit. I know I must keep on the matting."

" Yes." He smiled. " Very well. . . . Yes, that's quite right. The actual holding with the forefinger. The others are only to guide. Look. . . . Now I'll teach you the salute. Stand there." He took another foil from the rack and faced her.

She proved herself quick and intelligent, copying his thrust without the awkward poking of a beginner, though brought up in heavy skirts she did not find it easy at first to lunge. They were both of them too intent upon the lesson to mind when he took her unceremoniously by wrist and shoulder, and canted her into position.

" Drop your left arm ! . . . No, no, you must lift it again as you return : it helps you back. Watch this. Now. . . . Yes, that's better."

But when he bade her lunge at him, she bungled. " What's wrong ? " he demanded. " You did that all right only a minute ago."

" I know," she said. " But it's different doing it at you."

" I won't thrust back. Look, I'll hold my point down, if you like."

Her head went up at once. " It isn't that. But I'm clumsy—I might hurt you."

" You won't—I'll see to that ! But I'll put a mask on. I ought to have one anyhow. That do ? On guard, then. Lunge ! "

He stopped in a little while, and saluted gravely. " That's enough for you, I think. We'll go on to-morrow," and hanging up mask and foil he retrieved her slippers, amused to find they would both go in his hand.

CHAPTER XI

"I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet."

An Apology for Poetry.

"My goodness, Anne, what's wrong? Are ye not feeling well?" Bertha's shrill kindly voice cut through the dusk with a concern that made her forget her English accent.

Gilbert sat up abruptly. He had been gazing half asleep into the fire, for the only light in the room was the piano candles, and Bertha had been playing rather pleasantly. The land outside was muffled in thick snow, and for all the sea and wind made sound enough, there was the strange drowse on the air that snow brings with it. But the cry woke him to instant concern with its cause. He rose. Anne was in a low chair beside the curve of the piano, and sure enough there were tears upon her cheeks.

She got to her feet, flushed, and put down a book. James Keith in the background frowned at the elder woman, for Anne's embarrassment was evident. Bertha, however, took no heed of him, but returned to her question. "What's wrong with you, lassie, that you're crying like that?"

"I'm not," said Anne indignantly. "And I'm quite well, thank you." She realised then that the other's intentions were kind, and kept her temper. "I was only reading about Montrose."

"Montrose? Oh, that history book! What a funny thing to cry for! I can understand a novel, now.

I've cried myself over *East Lynne*—some of it's real pathetic. Not that I ever get much time for reading." She picked up her crewel-work with an air of virtue.

Gilbert intervened. "I think I can see Anne's reasons, if you don't." His voice was rather harsh, for the girl looked unhappy: Montrose, too, was one of his boyish adorations, and had worn remarkably well as he grew up. Anne looked at him, grateful for the rescue, for Bertha had made her feel rather absurd. Neither he nor she was aware he had dropped the "cousin."

Bertha looked up indulgently from the needle she was threading. "Yes, I see what you mean. There was a piece we had at school for recitation, about old plaintive unhappy things—no, it was far-off unhappy things—and a girl singing. It was very pretty. Anne likes poetry."

It was Kinnellan who spoke then from across the hearth. "Not so far off in this case, after all. The story is Scots history in little. A man with two men, three horses, and no money raises an army that effects sheer miracles: and then there's a hurdle to the Grass-market, and Argyll in the window. That's just Scotland. The Englishman has a cheer for a good loser, but he'll only help the man who is successful. The Scot will follow a lost cause through the gate of Hell, and as like as not bring it out on the far side winning. Then he'll stab his victorious leader in the back. That's aye our curse. We'll make a victor, but we'll never follow one."

"*Victrix causa deis, sed victa Catoni*," said Gilbert, with a wry smile. "I always thought Cato rather a snob for that."

Bertha cut in, indignation mastering her normal awe of the old man. "I think you've little need to be miscalling your own country, Father!"

He smiled, not without affection. "I spoke among Scots, my dear. No nation's the better for hiding its own shortcomings."

His son laughed. "As a rule they're proud of them, though they may be ashamed enough of their chief virtues."

Kinnellan chuckled. "That's a shade off the mark. What they boast of chiefly is the defects they haven't. The Englishman, with the finest poetry in the world, brags of stolidity. The Scot who will starve to send his son to college vaunts his materialism and his close fist. Tell them their real defects, sentimental gush with no action on the one hand, ungenerous arrogance upon the other, and either of them will probably knock you down."

"I suppose after all a country is like a woman. It's a gentleman's duty to lie in defence of either."

Bertha was shocked. "Oh, Gilbert, surely not!"

Her husband looked at her, smiling. "Not if he's lucky. But there are occasions when it may be necessary."

She was unconvinced. "But it's wrong to do evil, surely, that good may come of it."

The men looked rather gravelled. Both felt she had not given all the case, but had no retort, and it was Anne who answered, "Would you do good that evil may come of it—to someone else?"

Bertha stared at her, and Kinnellan took the words up. "Aye, Anne's got the point. It's true there are debts one dare not lay on anyone. But in practice it's not so easy to keep the balance. The Greeks knew that. . . . Is that you, Taggart? Aye, put me to bed. You should read on to the end of Argyll, my dear. You'll find it comforting."

Taggart and Gilbert carried him through the gallery, and as they set him down he turned to his son. "Can you bring Bertha here for a few minutes, when Anne goes to bed? I want to speak to you both, but don't let Anne know."

Gilbert looked startled, but the old man was smiling. "You're not needing to worry, my boy. I'm neither dying nor ruined, and I think my news is good, but I want to find out how the land lies, and I dare say you younger folk may be able to tell me."

"Certainly, sir." He went back along the gallery, considerably puzzled and rather concerned. The news, whatever it was, affected Anne, and all that he could imagine for the moment was that something was taking her back to France again. The prospect was somehow rather disconcerting.

Anne was putting her book away when he reached the drawing-room, and Bertha tidying her bag of crewels. He lit Anne's candle, and opened the staircase door. Her black silk dress whispered as she went up, and her lighted face floated among the shadows. She was smiling back as she passed out of sight, but it was rather the tears that he remembered.

He closed the door and sat down in his chair again. A framed silhouette was on the wall beside him, his mother's great-aunt, Caroline Kennedy. He remembered stories he had heard about her: she was a gentlewoman of the old regime, with the manners of an Infanta, the morals of a nun, and the tongue, when she so chose, of a cavalry sergeant. He wondered what she would have thought about Montrose, but a violent yawn from his wife recalled him to business. He got up again: "Sleepy, my dear? I am sorry, for Father wants to speak to us in his room."

She looked up from her basket at once. "What's it about?"

"He didn't tell me. Something to do with Cousin Anne, I think."

"Anne!" Her mouth opened, and she looked delighted. "I was just sure of that! Well now, that's fine! I suppose he would be here this afternoon."

"What on earth do you mean?" he said with some annoyance.

She laughed provokingly. "Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"Not in the least. I told you he said nothing," and he was further annoyed by her air of pleased patronising mystery as she led the way.

CHAPTER XII

" And wha could refuse the Laird wi' a' that ? "
The Laird o' Cockpen.

It was nearly an hour later when he stood with his coat off, staring out of the small square window of his dressing-room. The place was a mere bed-closet by origin : he had adapted it to its purpose when he married, before he had realised that Bertha did not mind his witnessing any stages of her toilet. To-night the smooth black of the panes had a rim of whiteness. The large pale flakes fell softly on the glass, and slid in the drive of wind down on the bars. He stared at them till their silent soft inveteracy had him nearly hypnotised, jerked free from the spell and began to empty his pockets, then halted again. Anne and Hailes . . . yes, it was surely natural enough. A good lad, too, clean, kindly, and straightforward. Bertha, of course, was very pleased about it. Quite sensibly, too : it was a decent match, if not a brilliant one, and Anne's own income was about seventy pounds, with income-tax threatening to rise to ninepence—though she would not be paying any, of course. It was to be settled on her, with additions. Hailes . . . little Anne. . . . Hailes was a handsome fellow. Most people liked him ; he had always done so himself. Anne at Pitarlo . . . they had a straight staircase there : he could see her come down it, her small shoe pointed with the silver buckle on it, below the pleated flounce of her black skirt —not black there, green, of course—why green ? Hailes waiting at the foot for her. . . . He flushed suddenly,

flung his waistcoat at a chair and missed it, and jerked impatiently at the bow of his tie, staring again at the window : he had moved a little, and the panes reflected his face. He could hear the sea, with a resolute heavy booming in the sound of it. A storm not far off ; likely enough it would block the roads with drift. He had a sudden violent desire to go for a tramp, but Bertha would probably think he was out of his senses. He rolled the tie round his hand and put it away, picked up the waistcoat—he had an orderly mind—and heard her calling to him from the bedroom. She came in then, with a crochet shawl on her striped flannel nightgown, and he frowned. Like many fastidious men, he had a good deal of physical modesty ; and though he had never told her so, he disliked having her about him as he undressed.

She was eager to talk, full of the future wedding. She would be sorry to lose Anne, but after all it could hardly be at once : there was the trousseau. Anne was a lovely sewer, and had such pretty French ideas for things.

" Do you know, Gilbert, she has lavender ribbon in her camisoles—run through the lace ? She says she uses green when she isn't in mourning. It must be an awful work putting it in, but it's real pretty. She said she would make me one. You get the lace with holes in at Falconer's."

He got his head out of his shirt. " Are *you* going to put your camisoles in mourning ? Hadn't you better wait till I leave you a widow ? "

" Gilbert, that's not the subject for a joke."

" I'm glad you think so. But you'll be leaving me a widower if you don't get into bed out of this cold."

The last thing he remembered as he slept was Anne's face with the tears on it : it brought back through his

drowse the fierce anger of pity he had felt for a moment as he rose and saw them : and that recalled him from the edge of slumber. He moved incautiously, and his foot went on to an icy patch of the sheet. It was a cold night . . . he wondered if Anne were warm enough, and spoke over his shoulder to Bertha.

" Are you sure Cousin Anne has blankets enough on her bed ? She'll feel the cold here, coming out of France."

She was nearly asleep, but mumbled something about an extra pair in her press, and a stone pig. A gull screamed suddenly, and the wind shrieked overhead in a fierce squall. He had been long on the road that day in the drive of weather, and for all the odd perturbation in his mind soon sank from wakefulness into strange dreams, where the snow rose about Kinnellan gates and Bertha was tying his shirt sleeves together with a long streamer made of pale green ribbon.

CHAPTER XIII

"When the bell ca's the congregation."
Tam i' the Kirk.

It was Sunday next day, but Anne could not possibly go to Mass. Even Bertha, who was no less regular a church-goer and had a shorter road, looked at the path, and decided that it would not do, even in snow-boots. Gilbert, a Scot and a man of his generation, had never considered it beneath his manhood to pay due public honour to his Maker. He went to church as he would, if the duty had called him, have gone to Court : and since he had no petticoats to hamper him, a drift or two was not to interfere. He made one concession to the weather, not unwillingly : he did not this week disinter the ancient tall hat he dutifully wore to church and funerals, but set out in a bowler and a mackintosh, and so had to turn back to restrain the inconvenient affection of his terrier. Rab would never have tried to follow the lum hat, but the bowler and Bertha's absence made him feel that his dates were wrong, and the soft thick snow had gone to his head a little. Gilbert, before he had him in the house, was driven to unsabbatic epithets, and there were paw-marks over half the garden.

He got Rab in, and set off by the cliff path. The wind of the night had swept it fairly clean : a low sun over the sea lit up the cliff, the black rock flaked with white over dark green water : the gulls cried an incessant *kui-kui*, and ahead the heavy clouds banked

for more snow. Gilbert strode onward steadily over the whiteness : he was whistling softly, and recognised the tune at last as a French rhyme he had sometimes heard Anne sing over her sewing—a queer monotonous thing, with a sort of ironic sadness, yet light-hearted. The words came drifting into the lilt of it :

Au clair de la lune,
Mon ami Pierrot,
Prête-moi ta plume,
Pour écrire un mot.
Ma chandelle est morte,
Je n'ai plus de feu. . . .

He forgot the rest.

He hoped Bertha had been right about those blankets : the wind had a fierce and bitter edge to it, lifting small whirls of snow across the fields, up the great slants of drift underneath the dykes. . . . The tune, even slowed considerably, was not a very easy one to walk to, and whistling on Sundays was an indecorum Bertha would not approve. However, she was some half-mile out of hearing : he continued with a slight sense of defiance—a pipe march this time, two phrases over and over, the second checking at alternate repetitions. There was the sense of endless roads in it, tracks in the heather down through windy passes : its Gaelic name, he knew, meant *The Drover Lads*, and it took one admirably over the ground.

He did not keep it very long, for all that. The other was back again, slowed by his stride—the tag of the words he thought he had forgotten :

Ouvre-moi ta porte
Pour l'amour de Dieu.

The words of it rather than the tune, this time. There was an old Scots song that they recalled, a forsaken lady

crying in the snow : the tune was heart-breaking, like the wail of wind around Kinnellan Tower.

O open the door, Lord Gregory,
O open and let me in.
At least some pity do thou shaw
If love I mayna win.

. . . Anne would give pity soon enough, but never ask for it. . . . The sad tune changed to one he could not identify, though it, too, was hers. He tried to remember where he had heard her sing it, but the clang of the kirk bell broke up the rhythm.

As he sat with bowed head through the first of the long prayers he remembered : he had escorted Anne to her own church in Stonehaven, on her first Sunday, and the strange slow air was some part of the Mass. The rite was unfamiliar, and he had not been able to follow the chanted Latin, but the ugly little church was homely somehow, with an atmosphere that recalled a clear spring morning he remembered once as a boy when he was swimming. He had to watch Anne carefully for guidance, though she had visibly forgotten him, kneeling absorbed with a strange infolded look, as though her spirit had gone deeply inward. He had his brief Continental experiences to thank for not, perhaps, having hurt her in the porch, when she held out her fingers dipped in holy water : he remembered in time to touch them and cross himself, awkwardly, but with a strong sense of the little rite's significance.

The congregation sat up with a rustle. The prayer was over and the precentor giving out a tune. He reached for the psalter, and sang a careful bass to *Stroudwater :*

Though hills amid the seas be cast,
Though waters roaring make
And troubled be, yea, though the hills
With swelling seas do shake. . . .

He had loved that psalm since old Merron made him learn it as a boy. The great sea-harmonies of Purcell's music rose, even in the harsh North-eastern voices, like the stream of the waves under Kinnellan Tower, the remote lights of the sea in winter sunshine that was low enough in the sky to be moving silver. . . .

He wondered after the two double verses if Anne had missed her Mass very much. He liked that priest of hers, Father Cameron : the sermon they had had lasted a bare ten minutes, with very little theology at that, but he had a weather-beaten Highland face, with the eyes somewhat remote, yet wise and kindly. Dr. Dishart was reading a lesson out of Amos : a Highland voice would have done him no harm—there was more than a touch of east wind in his Fife accent, with the sharp rise to end the sentences. Probably Anne was saying her beads in her own room : once before when they were weather-bound Bertha had come on her on her knees by her bed, a shawl over her shoulders and the black rosary between her hands. The rosary had puzzled her very much : it was rather a mystery to himself what could be the use of it, but it seemed to mean a lot to Catholics anyhow.

He came back to the Prophet Amos with a jerk, annoyed by his own lack of mental discipline. He prided himself on attending to what was in hand, and this morning his mind was going all over the place. *" But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it shall devour the palaces thereof."* He thought of the grim ruins of Dunnottar, and then of Anne, high on the crumbling wall. That seemed a long time ago, though —September, October, November, December—no more than that ? And to leave them—after all, Bertha declared that she was not yet in love with Archie Hailes.

She was quite sure she would be : himself, on consideration, was less certain. She would want a man with more to him than Archie : the lad was well enough, but not for Anne. . . . Amos was over, and Sandy Trail giving out the first line of *St. Mary :*

In thy great indignation,
O Lord, rebuke me not——

He had to attend to that, for the tune was in the minor, and without Bertha to tread on his toe if he went wrong he was apt to blunder the last line of it : he would not have tried to sing it but for example. . . . Anne was a little shocked by the sacerdotalism of Presbyterian worship : he had described a service to her on the road home from that Mass, and she was evidently rather horrified to find that the minister did everything alone, just as he chose, and except for singing, the people were only supposed to listen to him. The memory of her attempt to balance politeness with sincerity took him unawares and nearly made him smile. He fixed his eye on the bass-line of *St. Mary*, and sang steadily.

But this morning his attention would not be guided. Dr. Dishart reached his third quarter of an hour upon Ezekiel forty-fourth and tenth, a fierce indictment of Arminianism. The points clicked home with an Aristotelean neatness : Gilbert enjoyed as a rule the orderly marshalling of his arguments, his command of aptly classical illustration, and the great coloured phrases of the prophets. But to-day his mind drifted off their current, to a hat with scarlet berries beneath the pulpit. Under the hat was the pretty school mistress. . . . Anne had asked yesterday how Jamie Thomson was getting on in school.

The smell of peppermint grew even richer. There

was a rustle as the congregation changed legs when Dr. Dishart got to sixth and lastly, and in ten minutes more came the peroration. Another slice of a psalm—*Dunfermline*, this time—and Gilbert was in the snow again, greeting this man and that with Sabbath gravity: and then he was swinging homeward to Kinnellan, and trying to remember, as the sharp air caught him, whether it was Maggie's day for the morning diet of worship: she went to the little U.P. kirk in the village. He decided that it was, and that lunch would probably be cold in consequence: but in that case there would be hot broth at all events. . . .

CHAPTER XIV

" On y danse, on y danse."
Child's Game.

" Oh, Anne will come. You needn't be feared for that. She was saying to-day it was time she cast her mourning, and it will be good for her to have a little pleasure. It's dull for a young lassie at Kinnellan."

" Do you think so ? " Gilbert looked sharply up from his desk.

" Oh, she'll come, sure enough. She has a lovely dress put by, cream silk, with that new gauzy stuff, chiffon they call it."

" Very pretty, I'm sure. Does she find Kinnellan dull ? "

" She's never said anything. Anne's awful quiet, you know. But except when you take her riding, there's not much fun for her. With Archie Hailes getting pneumonia like that she hasn't had any kind of entertainment. I wish he had proposed first, but it's maybe as well. It's an awful thing the pneumonia, and she would maybe have worried if they were engaged."

" Do you think she has ? Is that what was making her quiet ? " He tore a letter across deliberately. " If that's it, I met him in Stonehaven this morning. I forgot to tell you. So he's about again. He looks thin, but otherwise no worse for it."

" You never told me ! Gilbert, you can be real aggravating sometimes ! Well, I'm glad he's about. I expect we'll be seeing him here soon, then. Gilbert, do you think I can have a new dress for the ball ? If

I'm a Lady Patroness I think I ought to. I wore the blue satin to everything last winter."

"Certainly, if you want one. I suppose you'll be going to Aberdeen about it? You'd better take Anne up for the day. Give her lunch at the Imperial Hotel. It will amuse her to play round the shops with you."

"Thank you, Gilbert. That will be real nice. I dare say she'll want to do some shopping herself. I can never keep white kid gloves from spotting here. Your father says it's being so near the sea."

"Very probably. . . . Do you mind if I go on with my letters, my dear? I want to get these off by to-day's post."

Bertha fled. She rarely ventured to invade the business-room, but an invitation to act as patroness at the Hospital Ball was more than she could keep to herself, and she wanted her husband's opinion on the propriety of taking Anne. That lovely white surah would certainly settle Hailes—it was just a dream. And once he got the length of a proposal she was sure that Anne would see the advantages. Now a new frock—she must have Anne's advice between pink and blue. She gathered her skirts and made upstairs in a hurry, crying "Anne, where are you?"

Gilbert, in spite of letters to catch the post, sat idle awhile. There was a sort of sulkiness in his face, unusual. Rab lopped off his chair, waddled beside him with an air of mournful deprecating courtesy, and hoisting himself on his quarters joined bandy forepaws imploringly and waved them. He had to wait for at least a couple of minutes before his master rose and let him out: then when he slipped through the door with a

little *wuff* of thanks, Gilbert stood holding the edge of it so long he expected a walk, and wagged the rearmost third of his anatomy, flickering out a pink expressive tongue. But the door closed, and Gilbert went back to his letters.

CHAPTER XV

" A woman can never be too fine if she is all in white."
Mansfield Park.

For all Bertha's forebodings of blocked roads, the night of the dance closed in with a clear brightness. They had set it for the January full moon, which shone on a land lying broad under piled white cloud, through a wind cold and eager, but quick with spring. Gilbert felt that as he leant from his dressing-room window, called by the moon. He would have given much for a horse under him, the pallor of the road in the half light, and bare black branches stirring in their sleep : it was inland he wanted to ride, not by the sea. He shrugged rebelliously, slammed-to the window, and attacked the delicate business of a white tie.

His wife when he went down had not finished dressing. She was very splendid in pale violet velvet—Anne's choice—that gave her colour and even dignity, and Katie the housemaid was chattering rapid Scots over the hooks.

Bertha looked round, a little flushed and more than a little excited : Anne had done her hair, too, and she looked extremely well. He said, quite sincerely, " I never saw you looking better. I like the colour."

" Yes, isn't it nice ? Anne chose it, and I didn't like it very much at first, but I do now, and it's a lovely match for my necklace." She held up a string of amethysts and small diamonds, that had been his mother's. The great violet-coloured stones suited her fairness. Well dressed, as she was now, she was a

handsome woman. Anne had insisted on powdering her nose, which gave her a tonic sense of being recklessly smart. And her shoes and stockings matched her dress, too. Anne had given her the silk stockings as a present. She looked at them complacently as Katie fastened on her amethysts, and gave a little wriggle of delight.

Gilbert, on his way to his father's room, reflected with mixed amusement and annoyance that it was very unlikely either lady would be down punctually, and decided not to fetch Kinnellan to dinner until there was some chance of its being served. He was half-way through the gallery but turned back, and as he entered the drawing-room from the one side, Anne opened the staircase door upon the other. He checked, with a sudden catching of the breath. Before, she had always worn black: now she was ivory, gown and smooth shoulders and small pointed face, only her eyes were very dark and brilliant, and a garnet ornament glowed on her breast.

She coloured at his stare, swept out the soft white feathers of her fan, and made him an elaborate court curtsey; and he woke with a start and came forward into the room with his heart beating, though his voice as he spoke was everyday and friendly.

"You look charming, Cousin Anne. I like your gown." Then, with a certain touch of the defensive, "Bertha has just been showing me hers. She says you helped to choose it."

Anne came to the hearth and stood there in the lamplight: her purfled train lay on the dull green carpet, and her slippers were ivory too, with high French heels. "I hope you approved of our efforts," she said. "We chose it partly to match her amethysts, but I think it sets her colour well, don't you?"

" She looked very well," he said, a little combatively, and then Bertha entered herself, her kind shallow grey eyes beaming with pleasure, and the rest of her justifying his description.

" My word, Anne, you look lovely ! Just like a bride ! Isn't she, Gilbert ? " with a little giggle. But he had turned to the gallery to fetch his father. The moonlight lay in pools on the oak floor, and the sound of a quiet sea rose very faintly.

Dinner was a cheery meal, though he was silent, for Anne was nearly as excited as Bertha, though she showed it less, and his father was pleased with their pleasure, praised their finery. Bertha brought up the bride comparison again, and he said :

" I gave your mother away, my dear, being the nearest approach to a kinsman she had available. She and your aunt used to wear the comb and mantilla in Lima, like Spanish ladies. They said it was to avoid being conspicuous, but I fancy there were other reasons too, for I certainly never saw them look more charming, especially in white for a *fiesta*."

Anne touched the boss of garnets at her breast. " I know. I remember Mother telling me once she used to fasten the points with this in windy weather."

He put up his eyeglass and looked at it, with a chuckle. " I was with your father when he bought it in Alvarado's. Those stones have done some travelling in their day—Bohemia to the Andes and Guiana, then back again to France and now to Scotland. They're odd things, jewels." He looked at the great signet on his finger. " I wonder sometimes what my sard has seen."

Anne shivered and touched her brooch a little defiantly. " I shall always think of these that Mother wore them, and Father gave them her "

"Quite right, my dear. Nothing of hers could have held evil long in it. And those stones are beautiful. I am uncommercial enough to prefer them to rubies."

She laughed. "Tante Isabelle used to say she had her doubts of anyone who liked rubies. She always said they were *rastaquouère*."

Bertha put in, "Does that mean unlucky?"

Anne glanced at her, and her colour rose a little. "No. I—I don't know an English word for that. It just means that she didn't like them. She would rather have had garnets—like Uncle James."

"Oh! But rubies are much more valuable, aren't they? All the same, that garnet brooch is real pretty. Oh—you've got a ring, too. I never saw that before. It's awfully nice."

CHAPTER XVI

" On a sudden a clear light."
The Duchess of Malfi.

THE music was very fair and the floor was excellent. The restless unease Anne had been fighting vanished: she was herself again, quiet, yet eager. She had danced steadily through the first half of the programme, and hitherto been lucky with her partners, though the best of all had been a waltz with Gilbert. She had not thought, somehow, he danced so well: but it had filled her with a strange contentment, almost like sleep, yet intensely and most vitally alive. The level poise of it and the throbbing music went to her head: as they swung round the turn of the room, with a movement as smooth and strong as a gull's flight, she laughed aloud —a rare thing for her—and he caught the soft sound of it and laughed in turn, a little recklessly, as he swept her through a gap between charging couples.

The music ended then, too soon for both of them. It was not till they had walked the length of the room, looking for Bertha, that either spoke, and then it was because they had run into Archie Hailes, and a pretty red-haired cousin of his from Brechin.

The evening passed, and for Anne very pleasantly until after supper. It was then that Archie lured her to a corridor window, under pretence of looking at the sea. She had been fairly sure of what was coming, and decided it would be best to get it over, if only to free herself from Bertha's hints. But she had not quite believed it, all the same, and it was a shock to hear the

words she had been expecting. She had never liked him better than that night : to know he loved her gave her a grateful pride, an exhilarated little sense of power and consequence, and, as well, a certain sense of apprehension, though of himself she had no fear at all.

The affair was rather worse than she expected. He made no parade of his hurt, but it was evident. It was intolerable that anyone so big and clean and kind and honest should suffer over herself : a sudden wave of humility and pity drenched all her resolution, and came near sweeping her into his arms. Indeed she probably would have landed there if he had not been in a hurry and lost his head a little. She was released at once, but the moment had chilled her, and she stood there small and grave in her ivory gown and gave him a quite definite dismissal. Of course he refused to accept his final sentence : but though she still pitied deeply he had no power on her. Only she had a keen desire to get it over, to be back in the peaceful everyday of Kinnellan.

Gilbert, who saw them re-enter afterwards, could guess by Hailes's stiff jaw how things had gone, and felt a sudden relief mixed with compassion. The lad was hard hit : he was sorry for that, since he liked him : but he should not have presumed to Anne. He crossed the room to her, and Hailes, with a mumbled sentence, beat a retreat. Anne's eyes were mournful, and his trace of pity for Hailes turned into anger. To trouble the child, when she had been looking happy. . . . He stood between her and the room, and asked if she were tired, but was dislodged before she could answer by her next partner, a black-browed heavy man whom he knew vaguely as Loutit, the new local Chief Constable, and, from the little he had heard of him, was none too pleased to find among Anne's acquaintance.

The band was under way with *Myosotis*. Anne swung away from him in Loutit's arm, and having no partner of his own he sat and watched. His wife waved her hand to him as she went by, and he smiled back absently, and watched the ivory dress go through the crowd. Her train hung by a ribbon from her arm, and showed lace flounces and small ivory shoes, with a glimpse of slender ankle as she turned. There were pearls in her hair, a delicate line of radiance in its darkness. Loutit was talking, with a gleam of red lip under his thick moustache. Anne did not look at him, but gazed steadily ahead into his shoulder: he was rather tall for her, and made no attempt to hold her so she could see. Her brows were contracted a little, her mouth compressed: she did not seem to be enjoying herself.

In fact, she was not. Loutit was vain of his dancing, not without reason: he was strong and light, perfectly true to the music, and steered with a flamboyant certainty. Anne hardly knew why she would have given almost anything she had for the dance to end. He said nothing to her in the least offensive. Indeed, his talk was limited to commonplaces: his opinions of the floor, the weather, and the music were the same as her own, and all her previous partners except two had asked her how she liked Kincardineshire. But she was violently and oppressively conscious of him, not as an impersonal friendly colleague in swift movement, but as something imminent, hot, intent upon herself, and heavily powerful.

His knee began to press against her as they turned: she did not know why her skin crawled at the contact, but tried to avoid it, and found herself too closely held against him. When he stopped a moment later she

was too relieved to be aware the music was continuing, or that they were through the swing-door of the passage. He said, " Shall we sit down for a while, Miss Ogilvie ? "

She acquiesced. Anything was preferable to dancing again. She could not go back to Bertha, for they had been following her amethyst train for the last two rounds, but she laid the tips of her fingers on Loutit's sleeve, expecting a return to the ballroom. Instead, he swung her deftly round the edge of a screen, that sheltered a dim alcove with two chairs in it. She did not know how to extricate herself without letting him see that she had taken offence, when it was quite possible that he had meant none : and below her sense of that was a furious inarticulate certainty that he did mean all the things that had offended her, and to show that she knew it would, somehow, play into his hand. She took the chair on the left, so as to have her outspread fan between them : but he said at once " Shall I fan you ? " and without waiting for her permission reached for it.

It was her hand and not the fan he took, and did not let go : as she drew it back his arm fell over her knees, and she felt the stir of his breath on her bare shoulder. He laughed, with a queer thick note in it, and gripped, and she tried to spring away, to find herself quite helpless to stir his arm.

He laughed again. " Come on now, let's be friends."

She leant back as far as she could, forced her voice to steadiness, and said coldly, " I think you are making a mistake, Mr. Loutit." He stooped nearer, however, and she said again, " Let me go, please." Anger was almost mastering her fear.

But he only grinned. " Very pretty. And suppose I don't ? "

She refused to struggle. "Then I shall call for someone who can deal with you more effectually."

Loutit, who read French novels (in translation), did not believe her, and stooped slowly, grinning: but she dived under his arm, slipped to the floor and up again, then stumbled on her train, and did cry out.

The screen whirled back as Loutit sprang to his feet, and he and Gilbert glared at each other over her: the stumble had brought her to her knees between them. Her rescuer's face might reasonably have frightened her, but as he jerked her up, not very gently, she recognised him and clung to his arm. It checked his half-formed action, and in the second's pause he had time to reflect that a brawl in Anne's presence and over her would scarcely do—and then that she might have fallen by an accident.

He turned to her, and said roughly, "What has happened?" and she answered, with her head very high, "Take me to Bertha, please. I have no desire for any more of Mr. Loutit's company."

Gilbert stepped in front of her then and said under his breath, "You infernal coward!" and the other answered aloud and angrily, "Look here, Keith—that's no word to use between gentlemen."

"Precisely. That was exactly why I used it. And I shall be glad to repeat it anywhere you choose." He gave Anne his arm then, and took her away. She could feel it shake under her hand, and there was a rim of pallor round his mouth.

He looked up and down the room. "Bertha is dancing. Will you wait for her, or would you like to finish the waltz with me?" He was stripping a split glove from his right hand.

"I've torn my skirt," she said. The damage was

nothing, but she did not want to stay with him just then. His voice, even to Loutit, had been quiet enough, but a sort of repressed violence in the atmosphere made her curiously relieved to find herself in the feminine peace of the cloakroom, where a cheery little pink-faced maid helped her to pin in place the flounce she had trodden on. She straightened her hair at the long glass : the string of pearls in it had caught on one of Loutit's buttons. Quite suddenly she saw herself—saw, not her hair or her dress or appearance, but Anne Ogilvie : and Anne Ogilvie was alien and a stranger. Her smile went empty of significance, and she stared at the foreign woman with her ivory gown and dark hair starred with pearls. The clear dark eyes stared coldly back at her, and a gas-jet caught the garnets at her breast and made a splash of savage colour in them. She drew on her long gloves and fled, thankful that the next dance was Hailes's and not her cousin's.

It was beginning as they reached the ballroom. To dance with Archie was like getting back to daylight. She felt safer with him than with Gilbert, and realised the fact with a shock and a kind of anger, then put the whole incident away from her and tried to feel pleasure again, for Hailes danced well and the waltz was the one she had enjoyed with Gilbert : it was the season's success, and this the last dance of the evening. But somehow *Venetia* had lost its magic : the sense of strong effortless speed was there, but clouded. Even without the slightly bewildered pity her partner's unusual silence roused in her, there was nothing left of the serene exultance with which she had danced to it earlier in the night.

The beat of the music shifted to *John Peel*, and their pace quickened. When the galop was over they stood

at the side of the room for *Auld Lang Syne*. There was a flutter of amethyst velvet and Bertha was by them : she had been dancing the last waltz with her husband, and it was he who took Anne's right hand as the company ranged itself round the bright pool of floor.

The circle drew in as they crossed hands in the second verse. Hailes was not singing : he was watching her, and she was annoyed, for he looked not only unhappy but rather foolish. Gilbert stared straight in front of him without expression, and she could hear him singing steadily.

It was over then, and the men gave the ritual cheers. She gave her hand to Archie for a moment, and followed Bertha's amethyst train to the cloakroom, where she was glad to find that the long glass was masked from her by the crowd of other women.

The moon was bright as they drove clear of the town, but a frosty wind was rising : they heard the sea. Bertha was tired, though happy, and soon stopped talking, and silence fell on them in the jolting barouche. For a while Gilbert stared from the window in a sort of muffled vacancy of mind, with a dim feeling that it was somehow rather important not to move. The wide bare land was desolate in the wind, and the moon indifferent. Her light was clear and fierce like a musical sound, that seemed to fill the vast dome of the sky.

He turned from it at last, and looked into the carriage. Bertha leant back in her corner, in the shadow. Anne was in light. She had a pale scarf on her head, and her eyes were lowered : he remembered her face very like that at Mass. Watching, he wished intently she would look at him. A stony patch of road made the moonlight quiver : she did look up, her eyes dark in her whiteness,

and he knew that he loved her, that he had loved her now for a long time.

He gazed at the floor. Their three pairs of feet were on the dark carpet of the carriage-warmer. Bertha's showed grey, Anne's white, with the shiny blackness of his own between them. For a while he stared at them. Then Bertha spoke.

"Did you see the fruit Lord Methland sent for the supper? I never ate a banana before, but they're real nice—much sweeter than pineapple. Nelly Jardine says they come from the West Indies."

CHAPTER XVII

" Fire and sleet and candle-light."
The Lyke-Wake Dirge.

" One for the last trick and ten for the cards—forty-three. That was the sixth deal, I think, my dear ? "

" Yes, Uncle James." Anne added up the score. " You are a hundred and twenty for the *partie*. Shall we play again ? "

" No, thank you, my dear. Bertha will be in soon to give us tea." Gilbert was at Stonehaven on some business, and his wife had gone with him to see to the redding-up after the ball. It was an uncertain, gowsty day, with sleet and the sea a raw and greyish green. Within in the King's Chamber the glowing fire had drift-wood in the heart of it, that burnt in a flickering bright-ness of rose and blue, making the riders stir in the dim tapestry. The gulls cried urgently in the strengthening wind, and an eddy of wood-smoke trailed into the shadow.

Anne put the cards away in their ebony box, and came back to the fire and knelt there, lifting a billet idly with the tongs. Rab hove himself up from the rug and flopped down against her, and she pulled his ear absently without looking at him, gazing preoccupied into the flames. Her small face was tranquil enough in the shift-ing light, but to the old man, watching from his chair, the gallant sensitive pride of it brought pity, for he knew, as our world stands now, that courage and sensi-bility together may be a painful compound to their owner.

He sighed. She had come, when they were alone together, to have more or less the footing of a daughter, and was scarcely less dear than Gilbert, or dearer even, for Gilbert was rather an extension of himself, as a man's son is rather apt to be, and Bertha had a little chilled his pride in him. Very deeply, he desired she should be happy, fulfil her youth, without a shipwreck either in storms or shallows, come safely into harbour before he died. He said gently, looking past her at the fire. " Bertha tells me, my dear, you have refused young Hailes."

She looked up, her dark eyes resolute. " Yes, Uncle."

" You do not love him ? Yet—— "

" I know," she said. " I like him very much. But —Uncle James, please don't make me marry him."

" Why, my dear child, I shall not ' make you marry ' anyone. But the offer is suitable in every way, and I should like you to consider it, at least. We shall all miss you badly enough when you leave us, but we are not so selfish as not to wish to see you happily settled."

" But I am happy here."

" I am glad you say that. It's a dull place, I'm afraid, for a young lassie, and I feared you would find little entertainment." He did not tell her that lately she had seemed to him languid and restless, and he wondered if the confinement of the winter was weighing on her, making her seek for change. He went on, " It is natural youth should seek youth. But you have no objection to the lad, I take it—none in himself, I mean ? "

" Oh no. He is very nice. I like him."

The old man sighed. The friendliness in her tone was clear enough, and he was not sure if it boded well for Hailes. She turned to him then and said very earnestly, " Uncle James, I truly don't want to marry him. I

can't give you any reasons—I haven't any. He is very nice and very suitable, and you approve of him, and I know I'm foolish, but I would so much rather stay here for a little longer. Please don't send me away." She was kneeling upright now, with a hand on the fur rug over his knees. Her eyes were frank as a child's but passionate with appeal, and a thought half formed in his mind and was thrust back in horror. Not those clear eyes . . . .

He patted her shoulder kindly. "Well, well, we'll need to leave it there for the present. Your mother ran from the match her family made for her, and I don't mean to give her daughter an excuse for levanting too!"

She laughed. "I've no one as nice as you and Aunt Solange to run away to! So I hope you won't. . . . I *would* like to—to please you, if I can, Uncle James. You've been so good to me. Only—only I'd rather not marry yet, if you don't mind."

Rab got up and went to the door, waving his tail.

"Is that not Bertha?" asked her uncle, turning.

She was listening too, and smiled. Her eyes were bright. "No, Cousin Gilbert." She got to her feet. "I'd better ring for tea. They'll both be home."

Her uncle looked up at her as she turned to the door. She was very like her mother for a moment, and he had seen Andrée de Méran with that glow on her, and remembered when. He looked too at the door, saw his son's face appear against the shadows, and the mouth and eyes grow suddenly content.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Since when another life we live."
To Chloe.

THE first reaction to his new discovery was to Gilbert a flood of profound still happiness. Merely to know Anne lived, was in the world, was a satisfaction to be pondered wondering. His whole life seemed to deepen and intensify: his senses were keener than he had ever known them, even to things that had nothing to do with her, the colour of sea and land and sky and building, the savour of salt weed at the low tide, the very texture of Kinnellan stones. Moods of a wild exultant strength came on him, that passed to lethargy, and came again. He desired of her nothing yet but that she should exist, and the sense of that was so strong it hardly required augmenting by her presence, though he was aware in that, delightedly, of every bodily line and hue and gesture, of each tone of her voice, the smallest altering of her expression. A man of less reticent race must have betrayed himself: Gilbert was only more silent, and at most times showed a new tranquillity.

All that he loved already grew somehow dearer. Even to Bertha, to whom at any time he was seldom brusque, he was gentler than usual, and that too quite without hypocrisy. He was fond of her in a way: she was a customary part of daily order, dependent on him, and he had not yet reached a stage where she was a hindrance; while conversely his love for Anne was a thing too far outside any experience to relate to ordinary life at all, except as her existence gave it meaning.

In short, he had plunged into a boy's first passion: and since he was twenty-eight and old for his age, and all the inherited hot life in him had found no outlet but the managing of a mediocre farm, the plunge was profound.

For a week he lived enclosed in a kind of dream. He did his work capably with some outward layer of him, and within that was almost fatuously happy, hiding it more by instinct and sheer habit than from any felt necessity for concealment. His life seemed part of the thing, not that of his life. But the customary course of externals continued about him: he was made to remember he was Bertha's husband.

He thrashed it out next day, tramping the cliffs. Most obviously, his duty was to Bertha. He had chosen himself to incur that responsibility: she had married him, trusting his loyalty, and kept her part of the bargain as well as she had it in her power to do. The marriage had never quite fulfilled his theories, but Bertha had done her best, and she was fond of him—and he of her, too: with all her shortcomings, and they pressed on him vividly enough at times, she was kind and honest: his affection had a base of respect for both these qualities, and she was a normal part of his daily life. And furthermore, she had been good to Anne.

But no one could help loving Anne. . . . That, of course, was true. What he could help, and must, was not to be a cad over it. Bertha, since it would hurt her, must never know. Nor Anne, of course: it was the first time he had thought of that. He bit on the stem of his pipe and stared at the sea, and suddenly knew what it would mean if Anne could love him. Well, he did not. Quite honestly, he thanked God for it. He was her friend: he must learn to be satisfied with

that : it was surely much, and he had a right to it yet. If he showed that he craved for more she would go away, and he would not see her again or hear her speak to him.

He tramped steadily on. The thing had to be arranged, and he arranged it, as he would have planned the ordering of his crops. There could not be any harm in loving Anne, if it did not break his other obligations : his mouth tightened grimly as he recalled what some of them were. He would have charged an army for her cheerfully, but this was a good deal harder, with no exaltations. Still, as a man whom Anne trusted and liked, who had the amazing good fortune to know and love her, it behoved him go straight, though the straight road lay ahead very steep and stony. The alternatives were to unlove her—a choice he would not accept if it were possible—or to give her good reason for despising him. Neither would serve, and it was impossible to leave Kinnellan. He stood and stared for a long time at the sea, and knew neither if the tide ebbed nor flowed.

Yet in a while he had come round to Anne again, to the little hollow under the base of her throat, the sideways tilt of her head as she looked up talking : by the time he had reached the low gate he was happy, and the course he had chosen seemed to him more bearable. He wondered if she were sewing in the drawing-room.

She was, but when he entered she rose and went out, with hardly a word in answer to his greeting. The pang was sharp, but he had no time to nurse it. Bertha burst in from the gallery door, crying " Gilbert ! Gilbert ! "

There was fright in her voice, and he turned to her. " Yes, I'm here. Steady—what's wrong ? "

Anne had come back again, hearing the cry.

" Father—he's ill. I think it's a stroke. Be quick."

He followed her hastily along the gallery.

CHAPTER XIX

" I discerned but one way, and that irked me."
La Vita Nuova.

James Keith came of a stock not easily killed. Helpless and speechless, his will fought the cold grip on him for the next three days, his eyes on the four of them about his bed: old Taggart scarcely left the room in that time. It was the break of dawn when he died at last, with a sea-wind on the run of the ebb-tide. Gilbert had Bertha and Taggart both to comfort: Anne knelt by the bed, her face as white as her uncle's and as composed, and the whisper of prayers came to him between Bertha's sobs on his shoulder.

They had all eastern Kincardineshire at his burying, for the old man had been a kind of legend, and his son, too shy to be ever really popular, was well enough liked when anyone thought about him. The day was a fierce grey frost, with a rime of snow. Gilbert, bareheaded by the coffin's head, stood just outside the low door of the vault, where the iron gate stood open, with little smears of frost on the rusty bars and a stump of icicle under the lock. He could see the memorial tablet to his mother—" Janet Cochrane Kennedy, second wife of James Keith of Kinnellan, born 3rd October, 1839, died 14th February, 1861." There was a tuft of grass on the shoulder of it, with a grey powder of hoar-frost on the blades. " Second wife ": Solange de Méran was buried in Lima, on the other side of the world: she had never set foot on the Scots earth that was piled in frozen clods by her husband's coffin, though but for their love Anne would

not have existed, and but for her death, himself had never been. A queer web these dead folk had spun between them. The clods fell then on the lid, and he knew with a pang that the King's Chamber was unoccupied. Somehow he had not realised it till now. He winced, with a passionate sense of his ungratefulness, and a dull prick of tears behind the eyes.

It was Anne that he met first when he came home. A Scottish funeral, for sufficient reasons, is a men's affair : the women stay in the house. She was very white, and he thought she had been crying, but she said nothing, only poured out tea for him. He was numb with cold, and swallowed the hot stuff eagerly.

The girl had turned away to the fire, and he heard her sob. It brought him to his feet, beyond the table : the sudden movement jarred the tray on it, and she looked round at him, her face puckered in weeping. " He was always good to me," she said defiantly, then rose to her feet and went out of the room. He checked himself from going after her, and in a moment Bertha had come in. She too was crying : when he went to change his coat a little later, the shoulder and lapel were damp with her tears.

He did not see Anne weep again, though Bertha, for some days, was inclined to sniff a little at every meal. He settled the legal business of his heirship : it was not very much—a few small current debts had to be paid and the will proved : there was an annuity for Taggart, who declined, however, to be pensioned off, and a modest sum for Anne, with a seed-pearl necklace and bracelets of her aunt's : Bertha had Janet Kennedy's few ornaments. To the servants and the older folk

about he had become "Kinnellan" now, of course: he found it odd to answer to the name.

The frost had broken to February weather, snow and small rain and a pale lambent sunshine, and a wind in the night with the scent in it of loosened water, and earth that quickened secretly, waiting the plough. The fragile airs worked on him much more deeply than he knew. He had accepted the situation in which he found himself, discovering in it, imperfect as it was, both satisfaction and significance. The latter it had yet, but the other shrivelled. He forced his mind from what he knew well enough, and crammed the endless inanity of the days with work, or gruelling exercise of one kind or another. His nerves began to strain under lack of sleep: he had to keep a tight hold on his temper, and managed it fairly well, revealing no more in the main than a morose desire for solitude. His swarthy face grew harder-cut in the lines: one night he horrified Bertha by swearing at her, though the penitence of his apology left her content enough, and ready to believe he was not well. He had his punishment: she began to fuss about him with a tonic.

Anne was silent these days. She had gone back to her mourning, and looked rather white in it. She seemed to have lost interest in her fencing lessons, for which he was equally thankful and disappointed. Now and again she rode with him, and then he was happy, though her growing recklessness scared him at times. But there was less talk of an evening in the drawing-room, and most of what there was came from his wife. He missed his father badly at these times—not only the man himself but his presence there, behind the women with their rustling dresses.

Now and then he fled from the house into Stone-

haven, thankful to be among men alone for a while. Bertha always sat up for him most dutifully. One of the nights his hand was a little unsteady, his speech too carefully precise, and he smelt of whisky: he had deliberately set out to get drunk—no easy matter, since his head was like a rock—and half-way through the process had thought better of it. Bertha wept at him: he dared not lose his temper, and half sober though he was, managed to keep it. But he did not try the experiment again, and had to wonder, afterwards, whether she had said anything to Anne: in which, as a matter of fact, he rather misjudged her, for she would never have given away his shortcomings.

The weeks of February were a whole lifetime, or rather they had no time in them at all: he had never known yet what it was like to be hopeless, or imagined a situation in which there was nothing to do, or even defy as one went down beneath it. In the past he had read a good deal of poetry at odd times, and it was strange to find how true things were he had thought no more than literary conventions. There were phrases he recollected in Catullus. . . . He got down his grandfather's slim calf-bound copy, and mustered the tags of Dr. Dishart's Latin. Some of it gave him the ease of words, at least: but there was more. He heard the wind on the tower most of the night, and thanked God Anne was not like Lesbia; then, sick with himself, came near wishing she was, so that he might be drugged for a little while.

Hoar-frost, pale sun, and rain brought the month to an end. There was a reddish haze on the trees inland, and rooks hunted for straw about the stables. Then March came fiercely: the days were drawing out, but

the first nights screamed wind in the face of high livid black and yellow sunsets—clear wind, between sharp swift showers, with Orion flung enormously in the west, and the great star Sirius lit like his death-candle.

CHAPTER XX

" She hath assayed as much as may be proved."
Venus and Adonis.

THE leaf-buds swelled and glistened : the gulls in daylight flew screaming behind the ploughs, and the wind yelled through it all, bitter with salt. On a night near the beginning of the month Gilbert came up the cliff path from the village. The moon climbed out of the sea between squalls of rain : the wind was backing, and a steep swell from south-east cut across the tide. There would be a North Sea hell let loose by morning.

He crammed his cap in his pocket and trudged on, bracing his muscles into the stress of the weather. Then he crossed a dyke and came on Isa Duncan. In the wild fugitive dusk her eyes were brilliant : the skirt of her crimson gown swirled and blew close to her, and her chin was round and white on a fur collar. She leant her body into the wind and waited for him, so he greeted her, offering her his arm, with something of a scolding for her imprudence for choosing to walk on the cliff in so strong a wind.

" I love the wind," she said, and quoted Shelley.

He happened to like the Ode, and it rather annoyed him. " The wind in your poem was westerly, and October. Shelley might have liked a March North Sea, but I rather doubt it."

She laughed, unabashed. " You like it, and so do I."

He had been chanting to himself as he came up, such ends as he could recollect of the Odyssey : but he said, " I'm a farmer—and sailor too when I have the chance

of it: and in either capacity I should prefer more manageable weather. It's going to be a dirty night for shipping." Two lights, yellow and red, pitched on the not very far distant horizon, a Geordie collier bucketing northward, hurrying for the long breakwaters of Aberdeen: they could see the field of foam as the bow plunged, and then she was blotted out in a black squall.

The squall drove down on them then. He saw it, and took a firm hold on her elbow: they were very nearly on the rim of the cliff. A flurry of wind and rain sent her against him: she staggered in the eddy of her thick skirt, and he put an arm round her: they were none too safe there. Then her own were about his neck: she leant back laughing, the warm soft weight of her against his body, the dark eyes very brilliant as she looked up. His tormented nerves reacted violently: he all but stooped, just checked himself in time, and flushing angrily, stiffened his muscles, and looked over her head into the rain.

She felt the half-impulse and the withdrawal, and laughing again reached up and turned his face to her, the soft warmth of her palm upon his cheek. Her sideways glance was languorous and enticing. He made himself unresponsive as a log, and picked her off him like an adhesive kitten, but her hands clung still, and he lost his temper thoroughly.

"Well, if you want it——" The kiss that followed smacked down on her mouth as grossly as a yokel's. She was not particular as to quality, but there was no mistaking his intent to be offensive: she tore out of his arm, a blazing fury, and he had to snatch to keep her from the cliff edge.

His face grew whiter as she screamed at him. He was far more deeply angry with his discourtesy than she

could be, and when he got leave to speak began a formal and profound apology.

She snapped her fingers in his face, and flung away inland. She was safe enough there, though with two wet ploughlands to cross before she could reach the road. He looked after her, and tramped on, his shoulders hunched. Few men can admire themselves in the rôle of Joseph ; and beside his anger at the false position, she had made him stoop to a gross lack of decent manners. By common gossip she was cheap enough ; but no worse, to the best of his knowledge, than a semi-urban coquette loose among rustics. To have kissed her lightly and been done with it would neither be here nor there, to himself or her . . . if at least he could have done it and been done with it. He had good reason, just then, to doubt whether he could, and the knowledge, in spite of himself, she had played for that, the sense of its very imminent achievement, brought a mortification he resented bitterly.

He met Anne on the stairs going up to dress, and cut himself in two places as he shaved. Bertha grumbled at him for not eating enough, but the food was dry in his mouth, and he could not get Isa's warm hands out of his mind, nor trust himself to look more than once at Anne. When the meal was over he dared not stay alone, but followed the women to the drawing-room, and sitting in his father's chair by the fire tried to read a treatise on artificial manure.

CHAPTER XXI

" The wind blew loud, the waves rase hie."
Annie of Lochroyan.

ANNE sat by the foot of the lamp, her hands at the dancing bobbins of her lace-making. The light came on her hair, kindling a reddish glimmer in the waves of it, and the small curls crowded between the coils at the back and the narrow velvet ribbon that held her locket. She wore a mourning ring, diamonds set star-wise in black, and the flicker of light on it fixed Gilbert's eye : wind and fatigue, the warmth of the fire and the steady rhythm of the jewel, made him drowsy in a while. He sank to what was very near contentment, close enough to the edge of sleep to be apart for a little from now accustomed endurances, and rested quietly, more adequately since Bertha was reading a novel.

The click of the latch jarred his peace. Taggart entered with a salver, and he saw that the envelope it bore was orange. He smothered a peevish oath and sat up to take it, but Taggart instead carried it over to Bertha. Telegrams, to her, meant necessarily bad news : she rose in a flutter, and finding her expectations justified, cried out for Gilbert.

He crossed the hearth. " What's wrong ? None of your people ill, I hope ? "

" Yes, Ethel—it's her baby—she's had an accident, and they want me to come."

" At once ? " He looked at the clock. " There's a train at nine thirty-five from Stonehaven. You can get that if you hurry. Shall I come with you ? "

"She'll not have room. I'll have to sleep with Laura. It's a month sooner than it ought to be, and they'll be all in a muddle. Robert's mother was to have been there, and she's at Alford—she can't possibly get there before to-morrow."

"All right. I'll take you to the station anyhow. Taggart, send down for Todd to yoke—the landau."

Anne had unostentatiously taken charge of Bertha, and swept her upstairs to get ready. As he crossed the bedroom to change she was putting his wife's hair-brush into a bag. When he came back Bertha was seated by the dressing-table, her smelling-salts in one hand and the other buttoning up her black cloth dress, while Anne knelt at her feet lacing her boots and combating her incipient hysterics. The hysterics, however, were partly etiquette, though she was very fond of her younger sister: and Anne's adjurations pulled her together in time, with a pleased sense of important responsibility.

In a much shorter space than Gilbert had expected, she was with him in the hall, fully dressed for travelling. He wrapped his own big mackintosh over her ulster and reached for a coat, then put it back and got down an oilskin instead. The lamp flickered violently as he drove the door open and hustled her down the steps to the stable-yard: the umbrella Anne had thrust into his hand was impossible to hold up, and as the carriage turned into the green glen he fully expected they would be blown over. The roar of the sea came through the deep channel of the road, and looking from the small window at the back he could see a line of surf white in the darkness: then he turned to his companion and began to make arrangements about money. He felt bound to ask again if he should go up with her, and go

to an hotel, but was decidedly relieved when she would not let him. Ethel's shoddy pretentious little house jarred on him : her husband was always awkward in his company, and covered it with facetious familiarity. He did not press the point : there was nothing he could do in any case, except keep Bertha company for a journey of twenty minutes and find a cab for her. It would be more useful if. . . . He shouted—he had to shout to be heard at all, and it was horribly difficult to put with any delicacy at the top of his voice—" If she needs anything, and they can't—manage it, I'll be glad to help. Do it as from yourself, of course—don't mention me. Let me know if you want any more than you have with you."

She squeezed his hand and he returned the pressure, and looked anxiously out of the window for signal lights. There was just time to buy her ticket before the train roared in, gleaming and dark with a long row of bright windows. He bundled her across the platform from the waiting-room, and tucking a rug round her knees, kissed her hastily on the cheek, and stood back as the whistle blew.

The three red lights of the monkey-face went out in wet darkness : the engine wailed the remote defiant exultancy that always caught him at the heart, and he turned away, recognising the station-master as he came under a lamp.

" It's a dirty night, Mr. Martin."

" It is that, sir. A good thing the boats are in."

" Are they ? I'm glad to hear it. Good-night." He turned away with a finger to his cap, dragged his collar a little higher, and made for the landau, which Todd had got into shelter behind the station-house.

As they cleared it the wind caught them from ahead.

The good old grey in the shafts did his best for them gallantly, but had to slow to a walk, and almost at once the off-side glass blew in, cutting Gilbert's cheek. He dropped the window, leaned out with a hand over his eyes, and shouted to Todd, who was huddled on his knees behind the dashboard, then got out as the man scrambled down, and bade him turn.

"Take Soldier back to Stonehaven, put him up at the Royal, and get a bed for yourself. We can't expect the poor brute to face this, and I very much doubt if we'd get the landau through the glen without a smash."

"Vera guid, sir." Todd took the horse's head with alacrity, and turned the equipage. "I'm thinking, sir, I'd be better leading him." He stopped and opened the door: he could just see his master's gleaming oilskins in the beam of an unsteady carriage-lamp.

"I'm going to Kinnellan. I can walk it well enough —it's not much more than a couple of miles from here." Todd began to protest, but Gilbert cut him short. "I'm better walking than driving, and I'm in oilskins. Miss Anne will be frightened if we don't turn up again." The groom would have offered to carry a message for him, but though Gilbert was a kindly master enough, his orders were orders: he turned reluctantly and closed the door, and when he looked round could see nothing but rain in the yellow beam. He clucked to Soldier and moved on with his head down, glad enough to have the weather at his back.

CHAPTER XXII

" And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the rairin' o' the sea."
True Thomas.

It is seldom utterly dark in open country, especially near the sea, and the moon was full. A moment after the carriage lights had gone Gilbert could make out the plashy road for some way ahead of him, and the flying scud that drove low under the sky. He shoved his hands in his pockets and strode onward, regretting he had not taken a sou'wester instead of his small cloth cap, which did nothing to keep the rain out of his eyes. He had hardly thought of it when the clouds ripped : a wild bright disc of a moon shone through them and vanished : the rain ceased suddenly. It was too late to cry Todd back. He would have to walk it, but it was easier going without the rain : the clouds seemed to be growing thinner under the moon, and it was lighter even with her hidden.

The wind exhilarated him. It was north-easterly, but an easterly wind loses much of its venom at night : the thin clear cold of it merely quickened his blood. He let himself go out on it—to Anne now, of course, but he did not resent the loss of single-mindedness. The wind seemed to enclose them, bind them together, and wall them from common life : he renewed delight in her. Anne . . . just herself : he lapsed contentedly on that, thrusting into the wind, and recovered a queer reckless happiness.

He was turning where the road forked to the green

glen, when suddenly a star leapt from the coast. He checked, and saw it burst and fall in a shower of lights. Another followed. He read their meaning, left dreams at once, and clapping his cap on his head vaulted a gate, and began to run by a field path he knew of.

Anne waited, holding open the door with her weight against it, till she heard the wheels of the landau in the gate, and went back to the drawing-room to get warm again. The room was as they had left it half an hour ago : lamplit and quiet, familiar and enclosed from the raging darkness that drove besiegingly at the tower and howled in the chimney. She knelt at the fire, her train tucked over her feet, and looked around her : she had often been alone in the room, but never with the knowledge that she was securely so, without interruption for a given time. It gave her a child's half-furtive sense of liberty, of being mistress of her world for a little while. She sat in Gilbert's chair, taking up his book, and touching the cover gently, then looked at the fly-leaf. "G. K. Keith, Kinnellan, 1889." The writing was characteristic—clear, vigorous, and direct, with an air of finality in the short straight paraph.

She let the book fall into her lap, and gazed through the light. It was seven months now since she had come to Scotland—only a little more than half a year. Much less than a year ago she had still been in St. Symphorien, and her aunt was alive. Ten o'clock striking ; she would have been going to bed in her own room. . . . Who was in it now, and what was she thinking about ? She could see the parquet floor and the high gilt mirror that reflected the goffered curtains of her bed, and the moon outside, the splendid Loire all silken under it. In spring the full moon used to rise up river as the sun

set downstream towards Nantes and Brittany . . . and the towers of St. Gatien across the water, the Tour de Guise and the Tour de Charlemagne. The catkins would be on the saules towards Marmoutier. Less than a year ago. . . . There was no such girl now as Mademoiselle Anne with her plait, la petite Écossaise of the good Sisters. She thought in English now rather than French, and felt—Touraine incredibly far at all events, and the smooth currents under the Pont de Pierre. She had dreamed of the sea as she watched them from her balcony, and now it was in her ears day and night : she had reached it at last. And restlessness as well—oh, France had been happier. Nevertheless, she did not want to go back.

Taggart came in, and she started. She was facing the gallery door by which he entered, and could see behind him into its obscurity. He was carrying the hot milk that Bertha insisted on her having at night, and put it down by her, did something unnecessary to a swept hearth, then rose and spoke. " Ye're all right, mem ? Is there anything I can do for you ? "

" No, thank you." He was looking at her with a mournful uneasy regard, that gave her a queer chill of apprehension. " What is it, Taggart ? Are you worried about the master ? He could hardly be home yet, could he ? "

" Not yet, mem. They will have a heavy drive of it against yon wind."

" I'm afraid he will. But—it isn't dangerous, surely ? " She went rather white.

" Oh no, mem. He'll be safe enough so long as he's on the road. But "—he gave a kind of gulp and glanced over his shoulder—" this wind's nae richt." He drew himself up then, as if he had said too much, and resumed

his normal impassive dignity. Anne let him get nearly to the door, then had to speak.

"What do you mean, Taggart? Are you"—the words came out of her before she thought them—"are you afraid of something?"

He came back and looked at the fire, with his face wooden. "I'm maybe no more nor an auld fool, mem. But"—he gulped again, and brought out the words in a rush—"I'm feared we'll be hearing ill news for Kinnellan. This wind's nae canny." The girl looked startled. There was conviction in his voice: then she called up common-sense.

"Oh, nonsense, Taggart!"

"I wish it may be, mem." He half made to turn, and did not. "I'll ask you nae to be offended, mem. I'm a good Presbyterian, as ye're doubtless aware. The Keiths has aye been that, though they were for the Stuarts. But . . . they say that the Auld Releegion has mair valeedity, in a mainner o' speakin'" (his English was giving way) "against the things that are nae tae be describit as canny, and—and since I'm certifeed, mem, that ye're weel disposed towards Kinnellan and them that inhabit the same, I mak bauld tae be seekin' yir prayers for it this nicht."

Anne rose. The old man had brought a lump into her throat: his appeal had too earnest a sincerity for mirth. "I don't think my prayers will be any more effective than those of a faithful servant, Taggart. But I'll certainly pray for the master's safety—is that what you're afraid for?"

"I couldna say, mem. I hae nae certainty on the point. But I'm feared for Kinnellan, that's the fact of it." He turned away from her into the gallery, and was back again with a salver and her beads.

"I made bauld, mem, tae bring doun yir rosary." And in an explanatory tone, "I was with the late laird's first wife, ye ken, yir guid auntie." He recovered his English. "I thought you would maybe need them."

"Thank you, Taggart." She smiled, and he went away. He had given her something to do, at all events. She crossed herself, knelt on the hearthrug at Gilbert's chair, and twisting the beads round her wrist took the cross in her fingers, and began to repeat the Litany of Loretto. Taggart had frightened her: she tried to believe that what he had said was folly, an old man's delusion over the house he had served all his days for love as much as wages. But the night felt strange. Even her own company was unfamiliar. And surely Gilbert ought to be home by now. . . . "*Vas insigne devotionis, ora pro nobis. Rosa mystica, ora pro nobis.*" . . . It could not take him an hour and a half to drive from Stonehaven. "*Turris Davidica, ora pro nobis. Turris eburnea, ora pro nobis. Domus aurea. . . .*" There was somebody on the stairs—not Gilbert. She stood up, clutching the beads, and cried in French, "Bon Dieu, gardez-le." Taggart burst in, in too much of a hurry to think of dignity.

"There's a Dutch ship on the rocks oot by the village, mem, and the maister his sent up word he's awa' doun."

The beads swung loose in her hands. "You mean—he's there?"

"Aye, mem. There was a laddie came wi' the message. I hid gane doun tae the gateway erch tae look was he coming, and noo, wi' yir leave, I'm awa' mysel'. I thocht it as weel tae say naething tae thae weemen."

"No, you were right. But is there anything you can do?"

"I d'na ken, mem. But——" His eyes were imploring.

She had an irrational sense that his presence might be in some way a safeguard. "Yes, go," she said. Then, "Taggart—is he in danger?"

"He's his father's son, mem." The old man was gone. The chain of the beads had broken in her hands: she could see the drive of the surf on Catteraw—a March spring flood-tide, driven by this wind. A hailshower rattled on the shuttered windows.

She put the beads in her pocket, and got to prayers again, in a queer blend of Latin, French, and English, but after a while was drawn to an embrasure. There was a moon, very wild and bright, and a stormy sea, with tattered clouds that raced at her out of the sky. She took a resolution suddenly, and turning again made the fire up to last awhile, then ran to her room, her hands already busy unhooking her gown.

It was not much more than ten minutes after that when she was down again, driving the pins into a tam o' shanter. She huddled an ulster on, and let herself out.

CHAPTER XXIII

"Teguntur
lumina nocte."

Carmen li.

Dr. Armstrong waved back the candle and stood up. There was little doubt the skipper would recover, though whether he would be very glad of it was possibly enough another story. But it appeared the wreck was no fault of his: the starboard chain of the steering-gear had carried away in a furious roll: they had tried to make Stonehaven with the hand-gear, but before it could be manned had fallen off, their after deck was swept and the hand-wheel went: they tried to rig tackles, losing three men at the job and the second mate, and then—Catteraw and the gale had finished the *Juvrouw van Hoorn.*

The Scots engineer told the story in good broad Glasgow, while the doctor was setting his arm. The mate bore it out, in a fluently ungrammatical Dutch-English. He was a big jovial fellow, like a brick wall, and when someone pointed out Gilbert as the man who had succeeded in getting the line to them, gave the latter a slap on the back that made him cough, and got up again to see how the cat was drying: it was he who had brought her ashore in the bight of his jacket. His enormous shadow covered the wall as he stooped.

The doctor was busy, for a third of the crew had been injured more or less, so the responsibility for making arrangements was Gilbert's. He got them sorted out in time, with food and shelter in one place and another,

accepted thankfully a change of dry clothes, and at three o'clock in the morning turned for home, pausing at the last house to pick up Anne. The good Sisters had taught her more than a little nursing, and the doctor found her a very useful aide.

The night was full now of clear steady wind: he could smell the rain still, and ebb-tide and wet ploughland. Stars shifted through the cloud over the sea, and a pallid shape of the moon was riding south-westward. He had lost his heavy fatigue, but they walked in silence: the delight of violent action was still upon him: he had led men victoriously in battle, with body and brain and will at their full reach against the blind devilment of a North Sea gale. Anne had seen his triumph, too: the enormous night had disemprisoned him from the day's frustration. The rain on her hair gleamed faintly in the moonlight, and she walked on by his shoulder, saying nothing.

They saw the loom of Kinnellan Tower in a while, and the white teeth of the surf under its cliff, and suddenly Anne checked, with a low cry. A fiercer gust than the rest had ripped loose her hair: she had lost her cap long ago, among the houses. The rope of it untwisted and blew out, and an eddy sent it up into his face, very cool and smooth, with a fragile unfamiliar scent among it: it clung for a moment over his mouth and eyes, making him blind: then he had her in his arms.

She sighed in a while: he could just see her eyes. She had made no movement, and he lifted her and went on toward Kinnellan. His wrist was over the main flood of her hair, but small damp strands of it blew about his lips. A strange and bodiless lightness had come on him, and a wild desire to shout aloud, but he could

not. The moon was under his feet, and he carried the stars.

He found himself on the doorstep of Kinnellan, and awoke. There had been a Dutch ship wrecked on Catteraw. . . . He put Anne down and unfastened the door, and the wind rushed past them : the flame of the lamp leaped high and then went out : they were in still air and darkness, smelling of stone. Mechanically he took off his dripping oilskins, found Anne and undid the fastenings of her ulster : she had not moved at all. He hung it up carefully, and stood still himself. There seemed to be a long space then of nothing.

He could hear the wind outside, and his own breath. He was carrying her through the dark curve of the stair. Upward : a gleam of moon : the door of the drawing-room. The moon again, the passage to his own door, the latch of Anne's in the wall under his hand. One window was uncovered and showed moonlight, and a dim square gleam of mirror among the shadow.

He set her down and she stood obediently : he heard the click of the door falling to behind him, recalled, remotely, he would have to leave her. . . . He had forgotten now he was holding her, remembered a hundred things about her urgently, and sought for the little hollow of her throat, but her collar hindered him, and he groped at it to get it out of his way. The hooks came undone in his hand after a moment, and the close-set buttons beneath ripped open also. They were falling together from an enormous height.

CHAPTER XXIV

" This dark light
Whose black beams lighted me to lose myself."
The Tragedy of Charles Duke of Biron.

A LOW sound of the sea, very remote. His mind swam up reluctantly through sleep that was a sheer profundity of content. With the slow weight of it still warm about him he opened drowsy eyes, very unwillingly, and found the daylight of morning at the window. He lay without conscious thought, regarding it, and grew aware it was not in the right place.

There was a stir of breathing on his arm, and suddenly a cold fear clung on him. . . . Anne lay there, grave as a child, withdrawn in sleep. Most of her hair was spilt over his shoulder, but a strand of it had fallen into her breast. He could not escape from what he must remember. That keen clear rapture of spirit, ensuing—this.

For a little while he lay quite still in Hell, but the disturbance in him seemed to reach her : she stirred a little, seeking to him more nearly. He wondered if she would bear awakening better alone, but his instinct urged him to stay and see her through it, and it was difficult to withdraw his arm : so he lay still and waited and did not move, and after a while of that her lashes lifted : she looked up, found his face close, and smiled contentedly, woke fully then. . . . He saw what he had been waiting for. There was nothing to say. He got up without looking at her, took his garments from the floor and began to put them on like an automaton : they were a fisherman's Sabbath blacks, smelling of

camphor, and he fumbled the unfamiliar fastenings. As he lifted the coat he had to face the bed, and his eyes fell on the crucifix above it. Anne, kneeling at Mass. . . . He turned away to the door.

But he could not leave her so. He came back and knelt down by her. She had not covered her face, and it was turned to him, but her eyes wandered unfocussed, like a young baby's. He stared at her, ungainly in his borrowed coat, his haggard face blue with a night's beard on the jaws and still rimed with salt. There was nothing to say. He got her name out hoarsely : a sob tore him.

Anne roused at that with a cry, and raised herself, stretching her arms. When he lifted his face from her breast after a while her eyes looked down at him profound with pity. He dragged himself to his feet and turned away from her, and with a hand on the latch remembered it was daylight now, more or less morning. There might conceivably be a maid on the stairs.

He listened carefully, heard nothing, and made the venture. As he closed his own door he realised how furtively he had slunk from one to the other—in his own house of Kinnellan. He wandered aimlessly about the room, and brought up at last in front of the dressing-table. It was unfamiliar, somehow . . . Bertha's brushes were gone. Bertha . . . poor Bertha ! . . . He went back to Anne, and tried to think of something he could do. Nothing. The only amends was to marry her. Which was not possible. He was Bertha's husband. Incidentally, unfaithful with her friend. They had both of them trusted him : he was responsible to his wife and ward. He shifted Bertha's clothes-brush, end for end, put it carefully parallel to the edge

of the tray. The silver brushes had been a wedding-present. Bertha had been delighted over them.

He saw himself in the glass, and recollected there was one thing at all events he must do for Anne. To hide this somehow. . . . Would that make it any better? . . . It would save her extraneous suffering at least. . . . O God, suppose she had a child? His heart turned over.

Well, the world had to be faced, and for the present at least it behoved him to lie to it, and lie convincingly. It was nearly eight. He stripped off the fisherman's clothes, had an icy plunge, and suddenly with a shock remembered his bed. It was smooth and neat, and visibly unslept in. He rushed to it, jerked the covers across the foot, and tumbled the pillow and the bottom sheet. It looked fairly convincing: he flung his pyjamas over a chair in his dressing-room, and had hardly done so when his hot water arrived. As he shaved it occurred to him to wonder if Katie perhaps had brought it before, when he was in his bath in the dressing-room. If so, she must have noticed the made bed. But it was not likely. His hands were unsteady as he fastened his collar. What of Anne, if people should know . . .? Odd virulent phrases of village gossip came to him, the sniggering jests of the smoke-room in Stonehaven. . . . As a rule he wore slippers at breakfast. He kicked them off, put his boots on, and went downstairs.

CHAPTER XXV

" What shall be done in such a worthless business
But to be sorry ? "

A Fair Quarrel.

THE dining-room was very normal, somehow. It steadied him : for a moment he almost believed the night was a dream. Salt air and sunlight came through the open window, and the sound of the North Sea swell under the cliffs : the ceiling bore dancing lights reflected from it. He poured out a cup of tea, found himself brutally hungry and thirsty as well, and fell to with a queer furtive appetite. Anne was not there : he had not expected her, and was half relieved, then wondered how she was, and put down his fork. The food had grown distasteful suddenly.

She came into the room then, just as he was accustomed to see her enter, in the black cashmere dress with the pleated flounces, and a tiny ruffle of white lace at the throat. She was nearly as white as the lace, with dark shadows under her eyes, that did not look at him.

Taggart had laid for her in Bertha's place. She checked a little as she discovered it, and a queer stain of colour spread on her cheeks. It was curious to ask the woman one loved and had just wronged irreparably whether she would have bacon or boiled eggs. Her hand, taking the plate from him, was a good deal steadier than his.

Somehow they got through the meal. Taggart came in. " There's a lad with a message, sir. The coast-guard officer's compliments, and he would like to see you

at your convenience. The tide turned after the crew got ashore, and the *Juvrouw van Hoorn* has not broken up yet."

"Oh—is the boy there?"

"Aye, sir. He's in the lobby. Will I bring him ben to the business-room?"

"No, I'll go." He flung his napkin on the table and went out, and Taggart turned to Anne, beaming all over.

"Ye'll forgive me, mem, for troubling ye last night," he said confidentially. "Ye see I wis justifeed in my suspeecions, though Guid be thankit, the maister's taken nae hairm, but gained honour in the eyes o' men. It was a brave thing, yon, he did wi' the line."

"I saw him," said Anne. "But he would be brave in danger."

"Aye would he, mem. He's his father's son." He beamed on her. "It's richt that the Guid Book says, 'Sorrow may endure for a nicht, but joy cometh in the morning.' It's a bonny clear spring day after the storm, and the maister's taken nae hairm. . . Ye're nae taking yir breakfast, mem. Is yir egg nae richt?"

"No, it's quite fresh. But I'm tired." She certainly looked it.

"Indeed, mem, it's nae mich wonder. Dr. Armstrong was saying you were as guid ony day as a nurse from the hospital. But ye'll be needing tae make up yir sleep. Will I tell Katie tae hurry wi' yir room, or will I be bringing a rug tae the drawing-room sofa? The maister'll be awa' doon tae the village, dootless, and ye'll get tae sleep there fine and quiet a while."

"I'm not sleepy, thank you." She felt a good deal more inclined for hysterical laughter, but was saved from more of Taggart's good intentions by the tolling of the front door bell.

For a moment she looked at Gilbert's chair in front of her. It was only this morning she had realised the nature of her love for him: the fact of it, that he mattered more than anything in the world, was a thing as matter-of-course as the morning daylight, and she had not known the meaning of her restlessness. He was Bertha's husband. That also was a fact, like day and night. It had never occurred to her that if chance had been otherwise he might just as conceivably have been her own. Marriage, the love of the books, meant Archie Hailes, or an abstract *parti* she would encounter sometime: she had considered it as inevitable, like dying, but believed in it, as touching her own concerns, no more than a normal man believes he will die. That it should have anything to do with herself and Gilbert was a thing that had simply not come into her mind.

Her body was shaking with fatigue, nervous and muscular: her eyes were heavy, and she felt as if her brain had been laid open. Deliberately, she poured herself more tea: it was bitter by now, but she swallowed it in gulps, and went up to the drawing-room, to think what she must do with the situation. As ignorant as she was, she was no fool, and various things that she knew as indifferent abstractions had suddenly acquired a concrete meaning. She had lived all her life with men and women of principle, and her Franco-Scottish ancestry and breeding did not engender sentimentalisms.

The familiar room made the whole thing quite incredible. There was a gay wood fire, and sunlight on the gracious shabby furniture: the bowl of snowdrops under the seaward window she had helped Bertha to pick yesterday morning. It wasn't true: the storm and the ship in distress, and Gilbert's recklessness, the

fishermen cheering in the lantern-light, the hurt men with their hairy chests and foreign speech, and the blood on her hands . . it wasn't true : she had dreamt it. It could only be a dream . . . the slow colour rose. That was no dream : her body was well aware of it. . . She found she was fingering Bertha's basket of crewels.

There was a hot strength of life under her frailness, and in spite of her it exulted, for herself. She did not sentimentalise what she had done, or seek to justify it : but if the consequence could be limited to her alone would have faced it recklessly, and entered her punishment, in this world or the next, with level eyes and a mouth that was clean of whining. But the consequence was not limited to herself : it touched Gilbert, and Gilbert mattered beyond all the world. It touched Bertha, too, and Bertha had been good to her. But it was Gilbert who came foremost. She had let him stoop to a baseness of which she was cause. It was his wrong of Bertha rather than herself that she felt, considering the thing : but she knew him well enough, was sure enough not only of the fact of his love but of its fundamental quality, and his, to know he must feel remorse towards herself ; and could not be unaware that he deserved it, although she took the main weight of the blame. If she had thought in time of checking him, she was very sure that he would have obeyed her. She should have thought, and had not. That was her fault. She stared at the situation, without flinching. Gilbert was central. What she must do depended on what was right for him : and his primary obligation was to Bertha. She took for granted, without thinking of it, there could be no more surrender to desire. An unguarded hour and too easy opportunity had trapped them once. So she must go away.

Resolute, she faced that, and began to consider what she must do about it. It was not very easy. Where could she go? And more important, what reason could she give? If Bertha had been another kind of woman she might have told her the truth: but that was impossible. It would only be a foolish piece of heroics, that would break her kind shallow heart, quite needlessly. They had wronged her more than sufficiently as it was.

Her mind slipped into a daze: for a minute or two she was actually asleep, and sat up with a start to find Gilbert's eyes on her. He looked haggard and ill: she half rose, with an instant impulse to go and comfort him, and then sat back again.

Not quite unnaturally, he misread the movement. He put his hand on the edge of the mantelpiece, and pushed a log vaguely with the toe of his boot. Then he looked back to her. "Anne—I've been thinking."

"Yes?" she said, hearing the word as if another woman had spoken it.

"There's this. I can ask Bertha to divorce me. I've—I've given her a legal right to it now." She saw his knuckles go white on the brown hand, and was faintly interested in the phenomenon. "Then I'll be free to marry you, if you'll have me." There was a sort of furtive hope in his eyes, underneath shame, and she winced at it and rose from her chair instinctively.

"What difference would that make?"

"You'd be my wife."

"Instead of—what's that word in the Bible? *Mérétrice?* I don't know the English for it."

He went a sort of grey, but continued to face her. "I deserve to hear you say that. But it's not true. You didn't know enough to understand. It's my fault. I

can't think of any other kind of amends. My God, I'd give all I have the thing hadn't happened. I love you, Anne, though it's hardly to be expected you can believe it."

She looked up, and the bitter twist went from her mouth. " My dear, I know you do. And it's more my fault than yours. If it hadn't been for me, it wouldn't have happened. And I'd have known we were wrong if I'd thought about it."

He shook his head. " No. It's not you. You needn't try to make excuses for me. If you can forgive me a little . . ."

" It's—it's not forgiveness," she said with difficulty. " Do you think I wouldn't be glad to give you—anything ? Only—I've let you get into this because of me."

" You'll marry me, then ? "

" Oh—that ? Could we call it marriage ? "

He said patiently, " It's perfectly legal, dear."

She flushed, and was silent a moment. " What about Bertha ? You'd divorce her ? Father once told me what was meant by ' a debt of honour.' "

" I don't understand. And Bertha would divorce me."

" Father said that the law couldn't enforce payment of a debt at cards. This was why one had to pay it, whatever happened." He was obviously puzzled, and she went on patiently, as if explaining to a child. " You married Bertha. I've never been to a wedding, but I know you have to promise to—be loyal. If you tried to put me in her place, she'd still be your wife. I'd only be your mistress, whatever the law said. The law can't alter what's true by calling it different."

He coloured, between shame and anger. " You don't care enough ? "

"If you'd asked me to be your mistress openly—we'd be honest if we did that, at any rate. But to cover it up, apologise and pretend we were respectable—what's the good of that?"

"I forgot—you're a Catholic, of course."

"What does that matter?"

"I mean your church won't allow divorce."

"Doesn't it? No, I suppose it doesn't. There's something about it in the Catechism. I wasn't thinking of that. It's just—we can't do it. It would be mean. You've—taken an obligation. If you broke it for me and I let you, how could we ever trust each other?"

"Haven't I broken it as it is? And I'm your guardian. Wouldn't you say that was an obligation?"

"That's different. You didn't think. And I didn't. We've got to now. We've done wrong because we didn't think in time: that's bad enough, but will it make it any better to go on doing it in cold blood, even if they can't put us in prison or anything?"

Gilbert turned round from the fire and faced her again. "I won't deny but you're right. Father used to say the law was for little people." He stood and looked at her, but it was her eyes he saw, the fighting set of her head. He drew a long breath. "Well, what are we to do? The only thing I can think of is to go away."

"To leave Kinnellan? You can't."

"It wouldn't be easy. But I could put in a factor."

"No. I must go."

He winced. "Where to?" And then, "We'd have to tell Bertha then, I suppose."

"She'd be—hurt. She's very fond of you."

Gilbert shrugged. She had hit him squarely. But he

went on, " She'd be pretty well bound to divorce me, if she knew."

" Why ? Would you ask her to ? "

" Not after what you've said. But public opinion would force her to let me marry you if—things came out. You're a lady, you see."

" What difference does that make ? "

" Well—they'd think it did. She'd have a hell of a time. It's no matter, anyhow. We'll have to say nothing. And go on as if—well, I'll do my best. Anne —will you let me kiss you once, for good-bye ? I suppose—oh, I swear I won't ask for any more than that."

Anne made a step towards him, and stopped. " I daren't," she said in a kind of hoarse whisper, and turned to the door. A shrill voice rose as she opened it, calling for Taggart from the lobby below.

" My God ! " he said. " That's Bertha. I forgot. I had a wire from her after breakfast."

They stood still, waiting. She ran up to them in a minute or two, wildly excited. Ethel's baby was a boy, only six pounds : she had fallen when the front door blew against her, but was doing well, and her mother-in-law had arrived that morning from Alford, superseding herself as housekeeper, and crowding her out. Todd had told her of the wreck, of Gilbert's part in the rescue and Anne's afterwards. She was voluble with pride and admiration.

CHAPTER XXVI

" Driven by the wind, and tossed."
The Epistle of St. James.

THE first weeks of March went by, windy and bright, with masses of white cloud striding through tall blue sky, and a sparkle in the deeper blue of the sea. The daffodil leaves were springing in the garden, the colour of the crocuses came and passed, and the hyacinths Bertha and Anne had planted in autumn scented the drawing-room, and took the bright sea-sunshine with curled gay flowers. In the household life continued outwardly in very much the way of the March before, only old Keith was gone, and it was Anne who sat at table with the others.

Gilbert and she had scarcely spoken together since his wife's return. Time seemed to have stood still in a queer vacuum, and their mutual silence clinched upon them both till neither of them could break it easily. Both felt, too, there was nothing to discuss, nothing to say that could be of any help. Gilbert flung himself into a dour fury of work on the estate, thankful if he could reach home at night in a daze of fatigue, but miscalculating often enough and tiring himself past the chance of the sodden desperate sleep that brought him half-peacefulness. Now and then he dreamed of what he thrust under his waking mind, but if the dreams had anything to do with a woman, she was more likely to be Isa Duncan. If Anne appeared in them, her face was averted, or she leant to him pitying and he could not touch her.

Archie Hailes, the spring fever in his youth, came often enough. Bertha encouraged him, and Anne by turns gave him remorseful kindness, and when he pressed for more, a sharp-tongued cruelty, unlike her natural way of speech or thought. He took it with a grave and steady patience: the boy was growing a man, and promised to make a singularly fine one. Anne valued him more and more, felt, as she did so, less worthy of the reverence he gave her. Accept it, even as no more than reverence, she could not: to reject it was impossible. It tortured her, and yet in some way his presence, substantial and kindly, was her greatest comfort. He brought her a faint illusion of security: nothing very bad could happen when he was by.

She knew that she must leave Kinnellan somehow, but with all her courage it took her a little time to face it, since it meant that she could not see Gilbert any more. She had an excuse for delay, too, in its difficulty, for her real reason for going could not appear without making things far worse for Gilbert and Bertha. Father Cameron might help, but she could not force herself to go to confession. When she did go at last he was laid up with pleurisy, and the church would have to be served by a priest from Blairs, who could only come on Sundays and was a stranger. She wanted advice as well as absolution, and Father Mackay was a young man newly ordained.

She came from Stonehaven with that, and a heart like lead at the thought of having to make up her mind all over again, and riding home by the high-road had a distant glimpse of Gilbert coming towards her, along a narrow lane between two fields. Out of the house, with the necessity for action suspended again by Father Cameron's illness, her primary emotions took charge for

a moment. His head hung forward: he sat with rounded shoulders in the saddle, and she marked the change, remembered the lithe easy poise of him on horseback in the days when he showed her how to take a fence. She wrenched her horse's head towards Kinnellan, and Todd, when he took him from her at the stables, wondered what in the world had taken Miss Anne, to bring the poor brute home in such a lather.

Archie was in the drawing-room, alone. She paused, and let fall the skirt of her dusty habit: there was a dab of earth on her cheek, and very little colour, for all the wind. He saw the earth and her pallor and wild eyes, and came to her, startled out of formality.

"My dear, are you hurt?"

She broke into strangling sobs, and he stood appalled, then caught at her hands. "Anne—little Anne—my dear . . . Tell me what's wrong. Are you hurt? Can I get you anything?"

She could not cover her face nor check her weeping. He put his arm round her shoulders, drew her to the fire, and had sense enough not to question her till she achieved some measure of control. Anne leaned against him thankfully for a little, too miserable to feel more than relief: then pulled herself together—and had a very keen temptation to stay where she was. She was worn out physically with nerve-strain and sleeplessness: the strong kind hold, the friendly voice at her ear, the sense of no longer fighting alone among shadows. . . . She put the temptation away from her and sat up, drying her eyes, unaware that it was on Archie's handkerchief, and set herself to the most plausible lie she could think of—that Admiral had shied and she had been thrown. She hated to let him think that a mere fall from her horse could make her cry, and then wondered,

as he scolded her gently for riding alone, what his pleasant serious blue eyes would look like if she said, " I am crying because Gilbert Keith has seduced me and we love each other." The bitter jest was hardly through her mind when it turned earnest. If she told Archie the truth, he would take her away. She was fairly certain he would marry her still. He would help her, at any rate. Archie was good.

She became aware then of what he was saying to her. She had heard it twice before, in much those terms, and the stammered phrases twisted her heart with pity. She had learnt by now what the lad must be suffering. He was too good to suffer so, for her. And under the sense of that, unknown to herself, was the hunger of spring in her blood, the empty endless nights to which she had wakened. Without her felt need for an honest confession it is possible he had won her, for the time. Indeed, she drew back from him, seeking for words: for a moment she was willing to tell him the truth, then act as he chose, and had little doubt what the choice would be. She dabbed her eyes again. " There's . . . something . . . " she said.

Gilbert came in. He glanced from one to the other, nodded at Hailes. She left them to entertain each other, and went upstairs.

CHAPTER XXVII

" In twilight shade of tangled thickets."
The Hymn.

GETTING out of her habit, Anne found she had thrust Hailes's handkerchief in it instead of her own. She shook out the unfamiliar size of it : it was wet with her tears. A.H. in the corner, in big plain square letters : they brought her a vivid sense of the man himself, and suddenly she saw what she had been doing. Not that, at all events : he was too good to cheat, even though he chose it himself with his eyes open.

She went on putting up her hair. The temptation recurred. It would safeguard Gilbert too. And salve something out of disaster, after all . . . life could not go on like this. Hailes would not ask too much : she could make him happy : her life need not still be spilt upon the ground.

It would not do. What was Gilbert's was his, even although he could never take it now. To give it past him was a cheating of both men. . . . And was she so sure, apart from that, she could do it ? With a sudden vividness, as she faced her mirror, she imagined the door behind her opened by Archie, with the most perfect right to open it, and cowered into the stiff silk of her dress.

Gilbert at dinner talked much more than usual, with an acrid jest to edge most that he said. He turned to her with cruel mirth in his eyes. " Your fine gallant has fled, Cousin Anne. I asked him to stay to dinner, as a good guardian should, but you were not there to

second the invitation, and my poor charms were not enough to keep him. It's a handsome lad—a healthy red and white. You'll break half the hearts in Kincardine when you crown his flame."

Bertha giggled loudly and dived for a fallen napkin. Anne was past pride by then. She gave Gilbert one look, her lips drawn back from her teeth with the sheer pain, and it sobered him. He was bitter enough thereafter, but when Bertha spoke of Hailes he turned the subject.

They were alone for a little while in the evening, and instead of their usual silence he turned and spoke to her. "Forgive me, Anne. Hailes is a better man than I am, and if it hadn't been for me, he'd have made you happy. That's no great reason for behaving like a cur, but——" His smile had a twist to it.

She lifted unhappy eyes, and made a little sound under her breath, and he caught her smooth shoulders suddenly and gripped them, feeling the small bones move under his hands. She did not resist at all, but went on looking at him, and after a moment he let her go and went back to his chair. He had a sudden urgent sense of her white body, thrust through her spreading silk like a blade in the sheath . . . a strand of dark hair trailing into her breast. Bertha came back, and asked him if he would hold a skein of wool for her.

Anne heard the clock at the foot of the stairs strike three. It would be dawn in a while. She had lately grown aware that these times passed: if one waited long enough there came as it were a point of ease in the pain, a sort of content, then sleep for a little while. Meanwhile . . . she turned on her breast and lay stiffly prone, with her feet hooked into the bottom edge of the

mattress. Her hair tormented her, and she thought of pinning it up. It was too much trouble. Then a black wind came and blew out her soul, in rags that had no shape or meaning in them.

In a while her brain began to clear a little. This, after all, was the cost of loving Gilbert. If she bore it willingly it might, somehow, purchase him what he might not otherwise have won : one could never know. There was no tangible measure of these things. It might have no value : one could never know. But even the chance . . . She set herself with more resolution to go through with it. Archie Hailes crossed her mind, and she knew the impulse of the afternoon had been mere need of ease, and then forgot it, having enough to be aware of as it was. He had roused her need of Gilbert pretty thoroughly, though she hardly connected one emotion with the other.

The night dragged on. The panes of her window began to glimmer grey : she could hear the shift of the waves as the tide turned, and sleep crept on her slowly out of the sound of it.

She was calmer when she wakened : the slumber of sheer exhaustion still clung about her, muffling her like a drug. She bathed and dressed, tacked a clean ruffle into her collar, and went down to breakfast. The room was empty in the bright March sunshine : Bertha and Gilbert both were a little late. Bertha, to-day, had a sort of sleek contentment : she noticed it, watching her vaguely, caught Gilbert's eyes, regarding herself with a kind of sulky shame. His colour darkened. Quite suddenly she understood, turned scarlet, and pushing her chair back, rose and left the room. Bertha came after her, of course, and she managed to control her voice to courtesy.

CHAPTER XXVIII

" For to refrain that danger plain
Flee alwayis fro the snare."
Ane Rondel of Luve.

THE east wind made aching draughts in the little church. April this year was colder than February. The black Passion-tide veil over the plaster image of Our Lady stirred at the edges : on the flowerless altar the door of the empty tabernacle swung a little. Father Cameron shivered again, and looked out of the confessional to the bright hard sunshine. Two fishermen in blue jerseys, his last penitents, knelt by the shrine of Our Lady Star of the Sea, their rosaries moving in the thick brown fingers. There seemed to be nobody else. He ran over in his mind those of his flock who had not yet been about their Easter duties, and decided he must wait a little longer. Holy Week and a recent bout of pleurisy are a trying combination to an elderly priest, even a six-foot Highlander with a back like a barn gable. He shivered again, and tried to fix his mind on St. Thomas Aquinas, and thought instead of Holy Week in Rome, in the days when he had left Blairs for the Scots College . . . of a lad's ambitions, most quaintly mixed of spiritual and temporal. He had aspired to holiness—and a Hat. He shivered and smiled and went back to St. Thomas Aquinas. After all, Mass in Stonehaven, with that young handful Jamie Watson for his server, was as much in the company of saints and angels as the Holy Father's Mass in St. Peter's itself. He wondered, not for the first time, what the blessed

saints thought of their local images—particularly St. Luke, who was a Greek, and whose plaster presentment, very un-Hellenic, simpered through its black veil across the chancel. But no doubt the donor's intentions were what counted, and if he preferred Donatello to the factory of Messrs. Burns and Oates, it was better not to be an æsthetic Pharisee. He made an act of humility, and was just about to go back to the presbytery and get warm when there was a rustle at the grate. He sighed and put down the *Summa* and turned to listen, smiling again as he recognised the voice : he was very fond of little Miss Ogilvie. She brought back to him Paris on a fine spring morning, the sunlit apse of Notre Dame by the River, as you walked to Mass along the Marché aux Fleurs. And she never made fussy confessions : five minutes or so, and then he could get warm again.

Her voice was unsteady to-day, not like itself. But the child would feel the awe of Easter Eve. She paused, after the initial formula, so long that he said " Yes ? " to make her go on. Then she continued. A parish priest is no more to be shocked than a doctor, and what he heard he had heard often before, though never at any time without sharp sadness. But little Anne Ogilvie—the low soft voice was unmistakably hers, quite clear and steady now, but the slight French accent rather more marked than usual. It ceased in a moment or two.

" What do you intend to do ? " he said. " Can the man marry you ? "

" No. He is married. I must go away, Father. You see—you see, we live in the same house. And we love each other. He can't go, so I must."

The priest's lank face was passionate with pity. He knew the Keiths well enough, and had always liked

Gilbert ; and his calling made him a very fair judge of men.

" Yes, you had better go," he said. " Have you other relations ? "

" No. No one."

He rubbed his head. " Have you any money ? "

" Seventy pounds a year. I can live on that, can't I ?"

" Well, I do, anyhow. But you can't live alone. Where will you go ? "

" I was thinking of the Carmelites at Léry."

He lifted an eyebrow slowly, and rubbed his chin. " Have you a vocation ? " His tone was a little dry.

" You mean—they wouldn't have me—now ? " Her voice broke in spite of her.

" No, no, child ! " he said in a hurry. " It's far from that. It's not two hours since I blessed a medal of St. Mary Magdalene for wee Maggie Mitchell. She did worse than you, and by the mercy of God lived to stand by Our Lady herself at the foot of the Cross. No Order would refuse an honest penitent."

" Then—don't you think it's the only thing to do, Father ? "

" H'mph." He gave a non-committal grunt. " I have not the pleasure of knowing the Reverend Mother Prioress of the Carmel at—wherever it is. But it runs in my mind that if she is a true daughter of St. Teresa, about the first thing she will ask a postulant will be, ' Are you going into Religion to be nearer God, or only because you're running away from the world ? ' Could you answer her ? "

" I—I don't know, Father."

" That means you do know, I'm afraid. A religious order is not a bolt-hole from the consequence of our sins. At the same time, a convent's probably the safest place

for you, though not as a novice—not just now, at least. If you find you have a vocation later, that's different. The Ursulines in Edinburgh take boarders, and if you can sew, you'll be useful enough. They've a workroom. Can you go there ? "

" For myself, yes."

" You are thinking of—the other person concerned ? Remember, you've a duty to him as well as yourself. His sin is as great as yours—possibly greater."

" No, no. It was my fault. I would have known we were wrong if I'd only stopped to think. And he's—sorry."

" He has reason to be. Well—you've been taught, I suppose, that the first mark of genuine repentance is an honest attempt to discontinue the sin. If you love him you've his soul to think about, as well as your own. That means you must go out of temptation."

She was long in answering. " Yes, Father."

" Well ? "

" It's—it's his wife. She doesn't know. She won't understand why I'm going away. And she's been good to me. I don't want to hurt her."

" You are likely to hurt her a good deal more by staying." He considered what he knew of Mrs. Keith. To come between man and wife is something that no good priest will do if he can help it, and Father Cameron did his best to be a good one. The obstacle was genuine enough.

Anne's voice went on. " That was why I would have gone into Religion. If I said I was going to be a nun it wouldn't affect—her husband."

" I see. Yes. But I'm afraid the integrity of the Carmelite Order is of more importance than sparing Mrs. Keith's feelings."

Anne showed no surprise at the name. "Yes, I suppose so."

"You'll have to tell her that you love her husband. That need not implicate him. It's good reason for going. What more she may have to learn is his affair. I'll write to the Superior to-night. You need not speak of leaving till it's arranged. And your penance—well, I consider I have set it. If you go away, it's proof of penitence, and I can give you absolution and your Easter Communion." His voice swung into the tone of familiar ritual. The ancient formulæ rolled over her head, and she heard the swish of his sleeve as he signed the cross. She got to her feet and looked up. The door of the empty tabernacle swung a little, and a girl came from the sacristy with daffodils, two others after her with a white frontal. Easter to-morrow . . . oh, this hadn't happened. But all the same, it had. She dipped mechanical fingers in the holy water, genuflected towards the altar, and went out. The strong cold wind blew dust into her face.

The priest looked round, and seeing no other penitents, slipped off his stole and got up. But he did not go back to the warmth of the presbytery. The three girls were busy decking the Lady altar: he knelt by the other, gasping a little at the stab of pain in his side, and began to pray in a patch of the bright sunshine.

CHAPTER XXIX

"We had a most excellent and eloquent sermon."
Pepys's Diary.

THE Kinnellan pew was in the front of the gallery, and half of the congregation were aware that Mrs. Keith's bonnet had been retrimmed, and inclined to think her a little unduly mindful of the fact. Indeed, she knew the high jet ornament was much more becomingly set than hitherto: Anne was that clever in arranging things. But the happiness in her kind shallow eyes went deeper than bonnets. She could not be sure yet, but she had hopes that were nearly certainties. Gilbert would be glad when she told him. She wondered whether to tell him now or wait: it might be as well to be absolutely certain, in case he was disappointed. But the hope might cheer him: he was looking real tired these days: men had a lot of worrying work, of course, though the estate seemed to be doing well enough.

She glanced at him sideways: he was sitting with his eyes fixed on Dr. Dishart, who was getting into the final quarter-hour. In repose his face looked worn, and the mouth was weary. She stole a hand to his knee under the bookboard: he started slightly, gave her a sudden glance, and after a moment put his own on top of it. It was feverishly hot: she could feel it through her glove—Bertha would have died sooner than take off her gloves in church—and she made up her mind she would tell him as they went home. It would maybe cheer him, and he would understand better than Anne.

She had told Anne overnight, in strictest confidence,

and it had been a little disappointing. Anne was generally so ready to share anyone's pleasure in good fortune —but, after all, she was just a young lassie, and obviously knew nothing about these things. Bertha's half-sentences, punctuated with embarrassed giggles, had required to be more explicit than she had meant, and she was afraid she might have shocked Anne rather. The poor bairn had no mother of her own: she would have to talk to her a little before she married that nice Mr. Hailes.

That gentleman, between father and mother in the opposite gallery, was looking sober enough. It was provoking Anne would not make up her mind to take him, and him so handsome and well-to-do, and real good-natured. But the bairn was as pallid and out of her ordinary as Gilbert himself. She would have to get Dr. Armstrong to give her a tonic for the two of them: it would hardly be possible to get malt-extract into Gilbert, but maybe Anne would be easier to manage. . . . She wondered why Mrs. Dishart starched the Doctor's bands so: they always wagged about when he grew fervent. His sermon this morning was not on a point of doctrine, but on the vanity of worldly matters: she hoped that impudent madam of a schoolmistress would take it to heart. She had done up her winter hat with cherries in it—expensive cherries: she must have sent for them to Aberdeen.

Dr. Dishart's high voice read a passage in sounding Hebrew, and then in English. Gilbert's hand, lying lax on hers, gave a little jerk, and the sermon was over. They were free in ten minutes and out in the bright sunshine of the kirkyard.

She was pleased to have a chance of bowing very stiffly to the schoolmistress, a condescending little nod

that put her in her place : and better pleased, then, in that Gilbert walked straight past her, and obviously never saw her ogle him. Normally she would have touched his elbow to rouse him to the omission, though indeed as a rule he was punctilious enough. This time she did not, for the cherries certainly called for a setting down.

The easterly wind of the day before had fallen. There was a sudden warmth, almost like summer. A placidly shifting sea sucked at the rocks, and there were daffodils out in the village gardens. They took the cliff path home, and she told him her news.

When they reached the house again Anne was there before them, already changed out of her coat and hat.

" Why, Anne, are you back already ? You're surely out early to-day ! I thought this was a special kind of day with you."

Anne turned from the seaward window. " Father Cameron is very ill again, in the night. They're afraid it's pneumonia. We'd no Mass, of course." She looked very unhappy.

" I'm sorry about that. He's an awful nice man, and much respected in Stonehaven. It's a pity about your Mass, too—I know Catholics think a lot about Easter. I expect you'll get a man from Blairs before next Sunday. Oh, I nearly forgot to tell you. Mrs. Gordon was telling me she liked my bonnet much better with the aigrette at the side. I told her you had done it up for me, and she said I was awful lucky to have a French milliner in the house." She patted Anne's shoulder.

Gilbert spoke from behind them. " Isn't it about time lunch was ready ? " and she fled to change. He came over to Anne : she had turned to the sea again, and

he stood close to her. "I'm sorry about Father Cameron," he said gravely, then took an edge of the curtain and pleated it in his fingers. "Anne—Bertha tells me she has been telling you—her news?"

Anne turned her back to him. "She told me last night."

They stood for a moment, looking seaward. There were hyacinths in a bowl beside her hand. Then the gong sounded, and they went downstairs. He carved the gigot rather unskilfully.

CHAPTER XXX

" —Rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants."

The Tempest.

THE school-bell rang. The teacher's voice stopped talking, and there was a clatter as the children rose. Miss Duncan locked her desk and got down from the high chair behind it, and her pupils filed out, thankfully, with the clatter of tackety boots on a plank floor. Her discipline in school was a good deal firmer than her complaint to Gilbert had suggested, even with the lads of thirteen who were some of them bigger than herself: generally, too, it was reasonably just, but to-day they had known Miss Duncan was out of temper, and gone warily, for she had a scathing tongue, and your Scot of any age is tenacious of his personal dignity. Even then, however, the afternoon session had been a stirring one, and there was a heavy crop of keepings-in.

The victims sat on dolefully in their places, hearing joyful sounds from their late neighbours outside. Monday was a black day enough at best, without this overflowing of the cup. They were pleasantly surprised when Miss Duncan turned round from the blackboard she was wiping and said, " You may go. James Rankine, if your arithmetic is not better to-morrow, I'll give you double homework for a week." Jamie Rankine grinned vividly and hoped for the best, then fled: he had a split-new cattie in his pocket and was anxious to test its powers with Wullie Steven.

The sound of him receded outside. Isa Duncan took

her hat and jacket from a peg, and the day's work that was past closed up and vanished, leaving her where she had wakened in the morning. She put a bundle of exercise-books into a bag, with a yellow railway novel tucked underneath them, locked up, and went through the village to her lodgings. The hat with the red ribbons had come down of late to be her fine-weather school one, and under the brightness of it her black eyes smouldered. She had a knot of primroses at her breast, the first of the year, brought her by a small girl in Standard III. Isa Duncan was quite sincerely fond of children, and for all her loud hot temper she attracted them.

It was not the school she was thinking of, however. Yesterday in the kirkyard Gilbert Keith had walked past her without so much as a glance, as if she had been dirt under his feet. The angry colour stood in her cheeks again. Since the night of the wreck, and that was near six weeks ago, he had quite deliberately avoided her if they met, but at least he had lifted his hat, had taken notice of her—and coloured at times, encountering her eyes.

She had bided her time, in patience. He was higher game than Willie Thomson at Braehead, would need more handling, and come a good deal less easily to heel. She wanted him there: it was not enough, now, he should think her pretty, cross the road for a word with her if they happened both to be in the High Street together. That would have been enough a couple of months since. Now, there must be more. He must be humiliated, fleech and beg and stand the onslaught of her mockery. He must: and even as she rehearsed his speeches she was horribly less certain of her power with him, horribly more that he had power on her.

She wanted his subjugation more than anything that

had ever been in her mind. As she sat at tea with *Her Husband's Secret* propped against the teapot, she rubbed at her lips, remembering that scornful kiss, and, what was worse, the subsequent apology. If he had only gone on being angry, even, it would not have been so humiliating. Discourtesy from him meant she had stirred him at least : there are women who would rather be thrashed than ignored. The apology heightened the barrier for which she hated him. And that madam his wife, set her up ! *She* was no better than Isa Duncan, at any rate. *She* wasn't even Normal Trained. Yet she had sailed past in the kirkyard with a nod like a duchess, and everybody knew that French niece of old Kinnellan's trimmed her bonnets. What good were bonnets, anyhow ? The cherries from Aberdeen had cost seven-and-six, and Gilbert Keith had sat through the whole of the morning service and never so much as let on that he had seen her.

She sat on the edge of her bed, picking idly at the fringe of her heavy counterpane, and looked with discontent at the thick white china on the table underneath the plant-filled window. Miss Ogilvie would despise a parlour-bedroom. Sallow thing, with her foreign airs and her French hats ! The keys of the old piano were browner than ever, the washstand in the corner more obtrusive. She recalled the day she had had tea at Kinnellan : she would have to go there soon again, to collect for the hospital. Gilbert Keith had got off his horse that day to talk to her. . . . She hated him. He would not look at her, but he should suffer yet. Let him despise her ! She would make him suffer, and that pasty-faced wife of his who looked down at her betters. To flaunt her conquest of him at Mrs. Keith. . . . She would have to achieve it first for that, and the facts

jeered at her. She had lost her chance. . . . Oh, he could go riding about with that French quyne. . . . The impatient jerk of her heels stopped suddenly.

She sat a moment and stared at the geraniums in the window, then kicked off the frayed and high-heeled satin slippers she had put on when she came in from school, and laced her boots again. She was smiling when she put on the hat with cherries, and took her hospital collecting-card. He should pay—oh yes, he should pay : she smiled at the glass. What a fool she had been not to think of that before ! She put *Her Husband's Secret* on the shelf, between *The Woman with Orange Eyes* and *Colenso's Arithmetic*, and savoured power again as she went out.

CHAPTER XXXI

"Leaving all is a hard matter: yea, a harder matter than many are aware of." *The Pilgrim's Progress.*

THE sky was changing inland to a green sunset, barred indigo over the fields. The young corn-blades caught the low light of it, and the shifting colours at sea had silver beneath them, that wrinkled a little in warm airs from the land. Anne walked on very slowly by the cliff path, away from Kinnellan, and the wide peace of the day tormented her. The gulls below her cried on a falling tide: she could hear the hiss of the foam, and it made her thirsty. The bitter wind, the sudden shift to warmth, had left her body languid, yet parched like dry leaves: there was an ache like slow fire in either breast, and the burn of it crept down into her hands.

Through the night of Easter Eve she had fought stubbornly for the strength to muster her will to leave Kinnellan: and had won, too. Now it was all put off, to do over again. She must wait till Father Cameron was better. . . .

A woman was coming towards her from the village. She recognised the schoolmistress of Skares, and did not want to have to talk to her. It was too soon to go back yet: she remembered suddenly a green ledge in the cliff Gilbert had shown her, easily reached, over the point of Kincraig, but off the track and invisible until you were on it. She turned and looked for it, made the short climb, and sat there, leaning out to watch the water. She had long ago lost her old fear of high places.

Gilbert found her there some twenty minutes later. The sound of the waves was louder than his footsteps, and she did not look up till his shadow fell on her lap. He said, " I thought you were here. I saw you turn up Kincraig a little while ago."

The statement required no answer, and received none. He sat down on the turf beside her. " Do you mind if I smoke ? "

" Please do," she said. He got out his pipe and filled it, and she watched the careful movements. They grew unsteady. He put the unlit pipe in his coat pocket, said " Anne—— " and stopped. Since yesterday morning the need to justify himself was choking him : but she sat frozenly. He could only get out her name again, and this time she looked at him and her eyes grew startled. He came out bluntly then with " It's what Bertha told you—that's the matter, I mean ? "

She moistened her lips. " She—she is very glad. She said she didn't know for certain yet. I don't know how one knows—I suppose it's true, though. It's an heir. . . ."

He caught his breath with a sound that was mainly a laugh. " It wouldn't surprise me much if it had your eyes." He laughed again as she stared and then turned away from him with a queer shivering cry as she understood. There was silence a little under the screaming gulls.

Then he took her elbow, leaned over her and made her face him again. " Anne—I can't stand it. Do you know how thick the walls are at Kinnellan ? " She looked bewildered, drawing back, for the movement had brought him very close to her. He gave a crooked grin. " They're pretty solid. But between the rooms they're only a couple of feet or so. You're something like four

feet away at night, in linear measurement. A pace and a half, say. It's amusing, isn't it ? "

He was grinning still. She put her hands on his shoulders, with a little pitying cry of " My dear, my dear—— " but he rose to his feet. " Oh yes, I'm Bertha's husband. Bertha's a good soul. And I'm a cad. And you're—Anne—oh, my God, Anne—— " He was kneeling by her again, and she gathered him to her, holding his face to her breast and rocking her body as if he had been a child.

She said in a little, quite steadily, " I'm going away. It will be easier for you when you don't have to see me."

" No, no—Anne, you can't go. My dear, my dear— " He flung loose from her and dragged her into his arms : she would have struggled, but could not. " Anne, I can't stand it—— " He was shaking horribly, and she saw his face. " It's all these weeks now—if you go—Anne—Anne—— "

She turned in a sudden agony of pity, and let him take what he would. Her body shrank from him, but he was past knowing that, and indeed in a little while she had ceased to shrink.

After a time he rose to his knees and looked at her. With her closed eyes and white face and disordered dress she looked small and broken. He thought she had fainted, and lifted her into his arms, straightening her disarray with an awkward and bitter tenderness, and she turned a little, hiding herself against him. She seemed to have come to the very end of her strength.

For a little space he knelt there holding her, watching the short bright grass stir in the wind. He remembered sleeping on the turf there long ago, the day he had swum the tide-race under Kincraig. One ought to think of

something: but there was a mortal fatigue weighing him down. To go home—that was necessary now. The sun was setting. But Anne was so tired. . . . She stirred then, looked up at him and said faintly, " Go now, my dear."

" I can't leave you like this."

" I'll come soon." She was almost too tired to speak, but forced her will to grip on exhausted nerves and think more clearly. Gilbert also was pulling himself together: she had to be guarded somehow. . . More lies, of course. . . .

She was speaking again. " You see, I must go away. This can't go on. . . . Dear, when I've gone—I loved you at least." She pulled down his head and kissed him on the mouth, and he answered it soberly and without passion. Anne got to her feet and picked up her sailor hat, but the coils of her hair were loose, and she had to pin it up again. He waited, watching her dumbly, and when she was ready, helped her over the ledge of rock: the sun was facing them on the horizon, under a heavy straight black bar of cloud. He gave her his arm down the smooth slope of the headland, where the grass gleamed, but once they were on the path she let it go, and a moment later he was glad of it, for a twist of the coast brought them face to face with the schoolmistress.

He lifted his cap mechanically. She was savagely bright-coloured in the low light, with her crimson jacket and bright red in her hat: her teeth flashed white as she smiled and her eyes were brilliant, and something about her made him thrust a shoulder forward between her and Anne. She smiled again, more vividly, and lingered. " It's a beautiful evening, Mr. Keith. I hope you had a pleasant walk. And Miss Ogilvie."

" Yes, thank you," he said. " It looks like rain to-morrow." Anne bowed to her in silence, and went on. As he followed her he heard Isa Duncan laugh.

The path held down along the edge of the ploughland, to the crest of the cliff where he remembered meeting Isa Duncan in March. Bertha was there, sat on a knob of stone.

The sight astonished him. She was no walker, and except on Sundays seldom went near the village. But her figure was unmistakable : she looked up, and he saw with some disturbance she had been crying. She rose and stood facing him, and dabbed her eyes. He stopped, of course.

There was a pause. She looked unhappily from one to the other, and began to sob again. " Oh, Gilbert ! " she wailed. " It isn't true what she said ? Say it's not true ! "

He turned cold all over. " What do you mean ? " he answered.

" That you don't love me now—that you're making love to Anne—you wouldn't do that ? "

He stared at her, stunned. It was out, then, and Anne—— The child must be spared this, at any rate. He dared not look at her, but found his voice somehow. " Who told you that ? "

" Miss Duncan from Skares. She said everybody knew it."

The shock of the emergency cleared his head. The girl's tale was a vengeful fabrication—must be. She could not possibly know. . . . He fought for time. If she did not know her story was true—but the village ? . . . That also, after all, might be invention. It was hard to lie before Anne, even to save her : she looked so

frozen. He caught his wits together, spoke with as much authority as possible.

"You did not believe a story like that, I hope?"

"Oh, Gilbert, you wouldn't, surely! But she said—she said the village people were laughing. Oh, Gilbert—I'm your wife—you wouldn't do that?" Anne stirred, and she looked at her and cried again, "Oh, I know Anne's bonny, with her pretty ways——" She swung round on the girl. "You've taken away my husband. Oh, Anne, I didn't believe you would do that. I've always tried to make you comfortable. And she says you're sneering, both of you, because I don't do things properly——"

Anne broke in at that. "No, Bertha. That's not true. Indeed it isn't. You've always been good to me. And I'm going away. But I never sneered at you. Oh, Bertha, forgive me."

Gilbert stood back, afraid and furious. Anne had turned the situation on herself. He must watch the two of them dispute about him. Man's ancient fear and anger against women sickened him suddenly. That Duncan girl—and little Anne with her white face, mixed up in this. . . . She was leaning forward to Bertha with urgent eyes.

Bertha looked down at her, and hurled an epithet. He cried out and clapped a hand over her mouth, and she twisted herself free, looked up and saw him. The fury in his eyes drove against hers: she broke, and whimpering, flung herself into his arms, and he fended her off from him with a violent movement.

There was nothing against his hand. He heard a cry, thin and remote, the rattle of earth falling. Bertha was not there, somehow. He stared at Anne: her mouth was a dark square, but no sound came out of it. . . . He

knelt to the cliff-edge through air that was heavy as water. There was a huddle of black on the shore below.

A sane man could not have climbed down the cliff. He was half-way to the bottom when Anne screamed. The pebbles crunched under his feet: he stood there dizzy, staring at his torn hands, where the blood ran in the skin about the nails. He turned then: she was between him and the sea, a huddle of black with her fair hair at the end of it. The light was beginning to go. Her face was unmarked, except for a little bright blood on the chin.

He looked up: Anne knelt on the cliff-top, leaning over. There was something crimson beside her. He knelt by his wife.

CHAPTER XXXII

"I must have had a dream of some such thing."
Rapunzel.

It was afterwards, hours afterwards indeed, he knew that Anne had brought men from the village, and Dr. Armstrong. He remembered her standing on the shore, while the doctor knelt at his work, but not much else. It was growing dark, and a loose end of her hair stirred in the wind. She came and walked beside him while he followed along the shore behind Bertha's body. Dr. Armstrong's overcoat lay covering it, but the feet projected: one of the bootlaces was undone and dangled below her skirt, and he wished that somebody had thought of tying it.

Old Maggie Rait had hurried to the house: he had a glimpse of her clean white apron in the hall. She had streiked his father: there was not a corpse in the village for a generation that she had not laid out. He said to himself then, "Bertha is dead," and did not know he had spoken aloud, until the doctor answered him pityingly, and drew him away from the stairs into the dining-room. He knew why, quite well: those twisted stairs were not easy for the dead.

The glass had a good three fingers of whisky in it: it might have been spring water for all he tasted, but it did something at all events to pull him together. He remembered Anne again: she was there in the room, across on the other side of the laid table. . . . It had been laid for three: he winced at that.

. . . The doctor had been talking for some time.

Something about coming back—oh, he was going, would come back again later when he had seen a case. Gilbert said something mechanically civil, and saw him out : the little man grasped his hand, and scurried away down the stone steps to the gate-house.

He went back through the hall again. Taggart was shepherding the bearers towards the kitchen quarters : he would see to it they had due hospitality. They bobbed sympathetic heads as they went past, for the young laird was well thought of by his tenants.

Re-entering the dining-room, he turned to Anne. She had to be seen to, only somehow there was nothing he could say. When he spoke it was to say again, " Bertha's dead."

She came over and put her hand on his arm. " Dr. Armstrong said she could not have suffered at all."

" No." He looked dully down at her. " I killed her."

She drew her breath sharply, and her hand tightened. " No, no. You must not say that."

" It's true. I struck her. I forgot we were near the edge. I thought she would touch me. So I tried to fend her off. I forgot the edge. That doesn't matter, though. She's dead, and I killed her."

Shock and extreme emotional exhaustion were making him a little light in the head. Anne looked at him, got him into a chair and stood above him, then spoke, very deliberately and quietly. " You're not to say that. Or think it. It isn't true. I know you did not mean to do anything but keep her away. The rest was accident. It might—it might as easily have been you. It's not your fault. It's not ! All of it that's not accident is because of me. I am to blame, if you like. That's

true. If it hadn't been for me, it couldn't have happened. You didn't mean it."

"Didn't I? I don't know." He looked up. "I don't *know*, Anne."

She groped at him with blind hands, and went over sideways.

CHAPTER XXXIII

" Frighted, and angered worse."
Cymbeline.

COLD water ran through Anne's hair. There was movement about her, and voices—Gilbert's voice, very close to her : she opened her eyes, with an effort, and found he was beside her, on his knees. She was lying on the sofa in the drawing-room : the lamps were lighted, and Taggart was watching her from behind his master, with a face of profound concern.

A sympathetic cluck came from over her head, and then a voice she knew for the big housemaid's. " She's come tae hersel, sir. Mr. Taggart, hae ye the wine ? " The girl was in full charge, and enjoying herself. " Come awa' noo, Miss Anne my lammie, drink you this up, and I'se put you tae yir bed and stay aside you." She got her patient's head on a broad comfortable shoulder, and held the glass for her. Anne drank obediently, choking a little : the sofa seemed to be sinking from under her, and there were patches of darkness in the air. One had to do something . . . the effort to remember what made her head swim badly.

The maid gave her a little protecting pat. " Come awa' noo, my doo." She stooped and picked Anne up bodily—she was a good deal stronger than most townsmen—and moved for the door, Gilbert following with a light. There was a crashing peal from the front door bell.

By the time they reached Anne's room, Taggart had opened. The night breeze blew sounds up the spiral

stairs: they heard a gruff voice; another, speaking English; Taggart's, protesting. Then the sounds drew nearer. Anne caught at Katie, who had laid her on her bed, and looked for Gilbert: he was still in the door, looking backward over his shoulder down the stair. Apprehension froze her, of she knew not what.

Gilbert leant forward, put the candle he was carrying on a table, glanced over it once at her and stepped outside, closing the door behind him very quietly. She slipped from Katie, made a stumbling run to the door and got it open. A light came up to her, and voices: she went down the curve of the steps, leaning on the wall, past Bertha's door to within sight of the drawing-room one. There were men below in the stair, one with a lantern and bright silver buttons, a dark face she knew —Charlie Loutit the Chief Constable: she recalled with a thrill of revulsion the Hospital Ball. Gilbert's voice spoke rapidly in an undertone. "Not here, Loutit. Yes, I'll come into the drawing-room. But for God's sake don't frighten Miss Ogilvie." He saw Anne.

So did Loutit, and stared at her with a queer expression, a sort of curious interest that frightened her. She was some steps above him on the stairs, and the light from beneath her shone into her face. He said formally and a little awkwardly, "I'm sorry to have disturbed you, Miss Ogilvie. I may want a few words with you in a minute or two." He turned then, and Gilbert followed him into the drawing-room.

Anne went back again to Katie. She was shaking violently. The girl tried to draw her over to the bed, turning down the sheet. "I said to Maggie tae fill a pig tae ye, mem, and she'll be bringing a cuppie tea in a wee meenute. Come awa' noo, Miss Anne, ye'll be

better oot o' yir stays, and Katie'll soon have you fine and comfortable."

" That man."

" Huts, never heed him. I'll tak on mysel tae tell him he'll just need tae bide till the morn's morn. The maister winna let the likes o' Cherlie Loutit be tramping up here tae disturb ye fin ye're nae weel."

She went down on her knees and began to unfasten Anne's bodice, who stood still and allowed her, then said, " I must go down. Give me my black cashmere out of the wardrobe. This is all crushed."

Her voice made the maid obey. As quickly as possible she washed face and hands, changed her sea-stained shoes for the slippers with silver buckles, and dressed her hair. Katie had fallen silent, but she followed Anne, passing her things with a quick efficiency, and fastening the fresh gown. They stood waiting then : she put an arm round her young mistress's shoulders, smoothing her apron vigorously with the other, and glaring at the door.

In a while someone knocked. Katie strode forward and opened it, then turned, expressionless. " Captain Loutit's compliments, mem, and he would like a few words wi' you in the drawing-room." As the girl passed her she hissed in her ear, " I'll bide ootside the door. Gin ye're needin' me, jist cry on Katie." She patted her shoulder. Anne caught the hand and gripped it, and went downstairs.

Loutit led the way into the drawing-room, and looked round it. Gilbert turned to close the door, but the policeman at his heels tramped in behind him. He lifted his eyebrows at that, and said dryly, " Sit down, gentlemen." Loutit flushed darkly, and swung round

and faced him, and they stood a moment in silent antagonism, like two hostile dogs before they begin to bark.

Then Gilbert remembered he was in his own house, and spoke. "You will have some questions to ask, I suppose, Mr. Loutit? I do not wish to waste your time unnecessarily."

"Yes, I have some questions." Loutit was still standing. "I have to see about these things, you know."

"Of course." He disliked the man too much to ask him to hurry. Loutit's official position gave him power: if he chose to use it tormentingly he must not be allowed to see that he could hurt. He steadied his nerves, and looked at the other inquiringly, with a half-conscious wish that the four-inch difference in height were the other way: Loutit was six feet two, and distinctly proud of it.

"I have just had word of the regrettable accident to your wife. I beg to offer my condolences."

"Thank you," said Gilbert quietly, and looked as calm as if he were on the bench in the licensing-court.

"I must ask you for particulars of Mrs. Keith's death."

"Certainly." His eyes narrowed a little. Anne's name had better be left out of this. "I was walking with my wife on the cliff path to the village. You know it, I suppose? On the narrow part, just over the south end of Catteraw, she slipped" (he shuddered in spite of himself) "and went over."

"She slipped, you say, at the narrow part of the path? What happened then?"

"I climbed down and found—and found she was dead."

Loutit looked up from his note-book. "You climbed down? Pretty good work, I should say. And then?"

"We went home, I suppose." He drew a hand over his forehead. "I'm afraid I don't remember very clearly."

"Ah, I suppose you would be a bit upset. By the way, who were 'we'? Did you carry—the deceased lady?"

"No." Gilbert winced in spite of himself. "Men from the village. They brought a gate. . . . Harry Leggatt was one, anyhow—and Johnnie Gibb. There seemed to be a lot of them. And the doctor. He'll tell you, probably, if it matters."

"I'll need his evidence, of course. Were these people there?"

"I've told you. There were other men, but I'm afraid I don't remember them. I'll ring for Taggart if you like—my man. He'll know."

"That's not quite what I meant. Were these people there when Mrs. Keith—slipped?"

Gilbert put his hand into his pocket, where it slowly tightened. "No. Miss Ogilvie brought them from the village."

"Miss Ogilvie? Quite so. You did not tell me she was with you. Or was she?"

"She was with—my wife and myself when it occurred."

"I see. And she brought men from the village. You climbed down the cliff. Very fortunate she was there, on the whole. How did your wife come to slip?"

The hand in his pocket was tightly clenched by now. If he did not move carefully, he might drag Anne into the affair. "I don't know. The path is narrow, and close to the edge."

" Quite so. You were talking, I suppose, and it would be very unexpected."

" Yes."

" Of course. You would be absorbed in the conversation. On private affairs, if I may put the question ? "

" Not particularly."

" Not very private ? Then I suppose I may ask what they were ? "

He was certain by now that Loutit knew—just what ? He could not, could not know he was Anne's lover. But —Bertha had said. . . . He had nearly forgotten that. And he was aware that he had paused, and Loutit noticed it.

" I am trying to remember," he said. " I don't think it was anything very important."

" Not very absorbing, then. It is strange your wife should have been so careless."

" She may not have looked where she was going." (Would the man never stop ?)

Loutit went on, " If you could remember the topic of conversation ? That's all, I think."

" I'm sorry—I'm afraid I can't. I've told you as much as I can."

" Oh, quite. No doubt. This can hardly be very pleasant for you, I'm afraid. But you know the police must do their job in these cases."

Gilbert breathed more easily. It was over. He said " Of course."

" I shall have to ask Miss Ogilvie a few questions."

Gilbert went rather whiter. " Won't it do in the morning ? I'm afraid she's hardly well enough just now. It's—it's been rather a shock to a young girl. She fainted just before you came—in fact, she had hardly recovered when you arrived."

"She has recovered, however, I believe? I had the pleasure of seeing her on my arrival."

Gilbert said nothing.

"You were coming from her room when I met you, I understand?"

Gilbert kept his temper. "Yes. I had just helped one of the maids to get her upstairs."

"Quite, quite. She's a near relation of yours, isn't she?"

"My ward."

"Oh—you're her guardian? You're in luck. I thought she was only a cousin—or something."

He would not lose his temper, and answered, knowing that Loutit knew it as well as himself. "She's a niece of my father's first wife. That's why she lives with us. Do I understand you wish to see her in the morning?"

"I'm afraid not. I shall have to see her now."

Gilbert raised his eyebrows. "If you insist. I will ask her to come down."

"Don't trouble. My man can go."

The plain-clothes policeman went out. Gilbert's heart turned cold: the last words meant open war, and he fought in the dark. What had he brought on Anne? To whom else had Isa Duncan carried her tale? And what exactly was the tale she was telling?

He started. Anne had come into the room. The dishevelled girl he had seen last was vanished: she was trim and self-possessed, with a touch of arrogance in her slight bow. Loutit ran an eye over her: he had last seen her with her collar unfastened and her hair half down. He looked at her neat coiffure, saw the change, and put his own interpretation on it.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Miss Ogilvie." He turned to Gilbert. "I'd like to see you again in a

minute or two, when I have finished with this lady." The red of his lip showed a little as he smiled. The plain-clothes man was holding the door open, and Gilbert went through it slowly, and down the stair. A policeman was in the hall, with his back to him: he checked, and went up again to the stair window, straining his ears for a sound from the drawing-room. The iron bar was blessedly cold under his hand.

As the door closed, Loutit turned round to Anne. "Well, Miss Ogilvie. . . ." He stood for a moment, looking down at her. "I've a question or two to ask, if you don't mind."

"Certainly. What do you wish me to tell you?"

"All that you know of Mrs. Keith's death."

Anne did not wince. She stood up quite straight with her hands behind her, as she used to say lessons in school, and answered, "Yes. I was with Mr. and Mrs. Keith at the time. She cried out and—and fell, and Mr. Keith climbed down to her at once. I ran to the village and got Dr. Armstrong and some men, but she was dead. She must have been dead when Mr. Keith got down to her."

"It must have been a serious shock for you." His tone was not unsympathetic, but she was conscious once more of that odd glimmer of curiosity. Even if she had forgotten their last meeting, she would not have bid for his indulgence, for she had felt the antagonism between him and Gilbert: the air about her was still electric with it.

"Had you been talking to Mrs. Keith before the accident?"

Anne's hands tightened behind her. "Yes," she said.

"It was an interesting conversation?"

In spite of herself she gave a glance at the door : then knew that Loutit had seen. But her voice was quite steady. " I suppose one could say that we were interested in it."

" Mrs. Keith was interested ? "

" I suppose so."

" I am asking you for facts, Miss Ogilvie."

She said coolly, " Surely the interest of a conversation is matter of opinion. I have told you how Mrs. Keith came to fall. What does it matter what we were talking about ? "

" I asked you a plain question, Miss Ogilvie. What was the subject of your conversation ? "

" I—don't remember."

" No ? Perhaps you can tell me how long it had lasted, then ? "

" Not very long."

" You had been for a walk, I suppose ? "

" Yes."

" All three together ? "

" No. I went out alone." She swallowed, and her colour changed a little. " I met Mr. Keith, and he turned home with me. Then we met Mrs. Keith."

" You were with her husband when you met ? "

" Yes."

" She was alone ? "

" Yes."

" So you all walked together ? "

" Yes."

" Did you actually walk together, or merely stand talking ? "

" We stood and talked, I think."

" What about ? "

" I have said I don't remember."

" Then—you will not be able, I suppose, to assure me there was no quarrel of any sort ? "

" Why should we quarrel ? " Anne also had remembered Isa Duncan. If she told the truth it might be disastrous to Gilbert, and already she was cold with fear for him. If she lied, she did not know what he had said, and there was Isa's story, whatever it was. Whether Isa knew it or not, it had too much substance. She might easily be fighting for Gilbert's life.

She attacked. " Why are you asking these questions, Mr. Loutit ? What can it matter what we were talking about ? "

" You don't like them, eh ? Well, I'll drop that. I'll ask you instead, how did Mrs. Keith come to fall ? "

" She must have slipped."

" Are you quite sure of that ? "

" I don't see how else it could have happened."

" You're perfectly sure of that ? "

" Of course."

" What is your exact relation with the Keiths ? "

" Mr. Keith is my guardian. I am not quite of age."

" Anything else ? "

Her hands gripped tight on each other. " His father married my aunt."

" Anything else ? "

" I told you he was my guardian."

" Quite so, quite so. A zealous one, no doubt." He made another note in his book, and turned the pages. For a moment or two he read them carefully. The little black morocco book in his fingers was somehow grotesquely small for his great bulk : Anne had a nervous dread that it would fall on the floor and make a noise.

He stopped rustling the leaves after a while, and

turned to the plain-clothes man. "Bring back Mr. Keith."

There was a sort of emptiness in time. A coal fell on the hearth and Loutit looked round at it. Then Gilbert re-entered. The waiting, short as it was, had told on him, but outwardly at least he was calm enough.

Loutit nodded casually as the door closed. "I want to see you both for a few minutes." The tone made Gilbert's brow contract a little, but he said nothing. The proceeding, he knew, was none of the most regular, but he would not challenge it: his presence might be some support for Anne.

"You are Miss Ogilvie's guardian, I believe?"

"I told you I was. She is not of age until June."

"Quite so, quite so. And this guardianship has lasted—how long exactly?"

"Since my father's death, on the seventeenth of January."

"Not before that?"

"She was his ward while he lived."

"You succeeded, then?"

"He was her only kinsman."

Loutit nodded and turned to Anne, then paused a moment. "Did Mrs. Keith take a share in this arrangement?"

"I don't understand. She was very kind to me." Anne's voice shook for a moment. She had almost forgotten Bertha was dead.

"She didn't object to her husband's—guardianship?"

Gilbert broke in. "May I ask what exactly you are trying to imply?" The fingers of his right hand had begun to move a little.

"Merely that I want to have some idea of the personal relations between Mrs. Keith and the people

she lived among. She had no motive for suicide, I suppose?"

"Good God, no!"

"You agree, Miss Ogilvie?"

Both of them looked at Anne. She stood her ground. "Mrs. Keith was a very cheerful person always."

"This afternoon too? She had had no disturbing news of any kind?"

Anne forced herself not to faint, though the floor swam under her: but her voice failed. Loutit went on, from the other side of a smoke that rose between them, "She had heard nothing it might inconvenience anyone else for her to know?"

"For God's sake, Loutit, stop bullying the child! What can she tell you?"

"I am trying to find out. Surely you would not want to prevent her speaking the truth? It might in fact have serious consequences for her if she did not."

"What are you trying to make her say?"

"Well, I have other witnesses, you see. I want a corroboration of their story, or a contradiction."

It was what Gilbert had foreseen, but the plural startled him. Anne moved to the back of an armchair and put her hand on it. The men faced each other, and neither spoke for a moment.

Then Loutit turned away and confronted Anne. "Had Mrs. Keith any reason to complain of her husband's attitude to other women?"

Anne lifted her head. "How should I know? I don't collect parish gossip."

"Their relations were irreproachable?"

"Damn you, Loutit, is that a question to ask Miss Ogilvie?"

"I think it might be, Keith, I think it might be."

He raised a hand in mocking deprecation. " I'm trying to make out if Mrs. Keith's death was accident, suicide, or—anything else. If the deceased lady, for instance, discovered that you had kept your mistress in the same house with her—women are touchy——"

" What do you mean ? "

" It's possible Miss Ogilvie can explain." He stepped back, not quickly enough, and the two crashed. A chair went over : the door flung in and there was a rush of men. Anne, holding herself upright by the armchair, saw Gilbert on his feet between two policemen, and Loutit rising opposite, his face sallow. He straightened his collar, coughing and swallowing. " A J.P. should know better than to assault the police ! " Gilbert said nothing. His captors let him go, and he stood between them.

" I must ask you to come with me to Stonehaven, Keith. With Miss Ogilvie it need not be necessary. The Fiscal will require her evidence, of course."

Gilbert said nothing, but faced about to the door. " Wait a moment," said Loutit. " To take a resisting man three miles in a dog-cart may be rather awkward. Sergeant Scruton ! "

" Aye, sir ? "

" Where are your darbies ? "

The sergeant hesitated : duty was duty, but he was not prepared to handcuff Keith of Kinnellan.

His officer made an impatient gesture. " You hear what I say ? "

Sergeant Scruton felt in his pocket, and turned to his prisoner. " Ye ken it's orders, sir ? " he said under his breath.

Gilbert put out his hands. " All right, Sergeant," he said quietly. He was white at the nostrils. The iron

bracelets clicked. Anne drew in her breath, and crumpled on to the floor between the two of them.

Loutit picked her up, not ungently, and faced Katie : she bristled to the ends of her starched streamers. " Fit hae ye deen wi' Miss Anne ? " She snatched her charge. " Come awa tae Katie, my lamb ! Ye muckle breets ! " She glared at the police, who retreated cowed. Gilbert said thankfully, " That's right, Katie. Look after Miss Anne. Tell her not to worry about me. I'll be all right." He turned to the door, before Anne should come round again, and passed Taggart's horrified face in the stone hall.

CHAPTER XXXIV

" Here in this prisoun mote we endure."
The Knightes Tale.

AFTERWARDS Gilbert remembered sitting by Loutit, with the sergeant and the plain-clothes man in the back seat. The sergeant had put his hat on his head for him, and wrapped an overcoat about his shoulders, but it slipped off as they jolted going up the glen.

There were brief formalities over a book, but it was too late for his examination, or for bail. He was marched down a short flagged corridor smelling of whitewash : a door shut just at his back : he was alone. The sound of the closing door all but broke his nerve : for a moment he could have beaten on the panels. But the effort to self-control was salutary. It cleared his head : he had already been trying to think what was the best thing to do about Anne, supposing they intended to charge him with murder. He forced himself to consider it again, though he wanted desperately to go to sleep.

The door moved in : the sergeant was there again. " Gweed guide's, sir, hae they nae teen aff thae haun'-cuffs ? " He felt in his pocket for a key, and the irons slipped from Gilbert's wrists. " Fit'll I bring tae ye, sir ? Ane o' the lads wull bring ye in a supper fae the Royal, and ye'll need blankets." He spoke with the tone and manner of a good host.

Gilbert looked at him and jested automatically. " You make your prisoners comfortable, Sergeant."

The big man grinned embarrassedly. " Aweel, sir. . . . Ye see, in a mainner o' speakin, ye're nae richtly a

prisoner, since ye haena been tried. Ye're just in custody. It's a distinction, as I doutna ye'll ken yirsel."

Gilbert took the chance: the sergeant was a kindly soul, to be sure, but this would hardly be his manner towards a murderer. "Well, I know I'm here!" he said, smiling. "But I'm not very certain yet how it came about."

The sergeant's very blue eyes grew more professional. "Aweel, sir, I d'na richtly ken. Captain Loutit came in wi' orders tae ging tae Kinnellan, since a lassie hid brocht word o' an accident tae yir gweed leddy. And I'm sure, sir, we were a' richt vexed tae hear o't, and you wi' sic a recent death in the faimly. Sae Nicol Leggat and Geordie Watson and mysel we made tae Kinnellan in the Captain's machine, and the lave o't ye ken yirsel, sir." He coughed delicately, having next seen his superior on his back, with Gilbert at his throat on top of him.

Gilbert looked at him squarely, but the sergeant was either ignorant or discreet. The bright blue eyes regarded him kindly enough, and the man's manner was entirely respectful. "I'll send ane o' the lads for a bit supper, sir, and ging doun mysel tae the wife for blankets tae ye."

"Thank you. That's very decent of you, Sergeant. Don't trouble about the supper, though. I don't want any."

The sergeant nodded, with a little sympathising click of the tongue, swung round with a thud of regulation boots, and vanished. Gilbert sat down on the plank bed, rather heartened. He had met Scruton often enough, and liked him. The man's attitude was so completely unchanged it did much to bring back his

own grip on normality : he felt himself again, and took more heart.

Scruton had told him little, certainly. He marshalled his facts, trying to make out a line of defence for Anne. Loutit had implied—his hands clenched fiercely—that she was his mistress : so, in the eyes of the world, she was, if the facts came out. There was no blinking that : he had brought this to her. He set his teeth and went on. Loutit had practically accused him of Bertha's murder : he had accused himself of it three hours ago, and knew he was responsible for her death. But to have the charge of murder brought by another made him see its untruth. He was legally innocent. And also, he had not been charged with murder, or even with the culpable homicide of which he might, perhaps more probably, be accused. " Assaulting the police in the execution of their duty " might be awkward enough when he came before the Sheriff, unless Maxwell would take his word without further question that Loutit had said what only a blow could answer. Legally, of course, that was no defence. Practically—well, there was no love lost between the two of them. Sergeant Scruton was obviously sympathetic, at all events, which looked as if he thought his prisoner was in the cells for nothing more serious than a temper lost for fairly sufficient reasons. Had Loutit any grounds for his implication ? " A lassie— " He got up and paced the cell. Isa Duncan had told Bertha—what was true. Had she told Loutit ? Did she *know* it was true ? If not, was it in fact the local gossip, or was that and the rest of the tale the girl's invention ? What concrete details had she ? What could she know ? The whole affair was worse than a North Sea fog.

And Loutit had said " witnesses." Was he lying ?

He thought of the ledge in the cliffs under Kincraig, and thrust his hands more deeply in his pockets. The fool, the blind lustful fool that he had been! If there was a witness to that, then Anne was ruined. It occurred to him that he could marry her now. And that, if the facts came out, they would probably hang him. There was a fine clear motive to show a jury. Anne in that case—would they bring her in art and part?

He wiped his forehead again, and faced the chances. Bertha had only just seen Isa Duncan. Therefore Isa was at Kinnellan, or pretty near it, when they turned for home. She could not know of that, then. But another witness? And the night of the storm? No: at the very worst, only Taggart or Katie could have learnt of that, and they would have jumped over the cliffs sooner than tell it. It was back to Isa, then, and Loutit's anonymous witness, if he existed. But the tale would be damnably difficult to disprove. He would have to lie like a Cretan—and on oath, too. The idea made him feel sick: but to give Anne away, in the trouble he had brought on her, was worse. One way or another, he was bound to play the cad, and pretty thoroughly: the only thing left was to confine the consequence, so far as he could, to himself.

He checked his tramping. Anne would have to give evidence. Anne, standing in the box in the Court of Justiciary, with a crowd of people staring and commenting. . . . He could hear the delighted sniggers from the back benches as the Crown Advocate put the obvious questions. A choice for Anne, too, between breaking a solemn oath, or hanging him and proclaiming herself a wanton.

He forced himself to sanity. There was a chance. A thin one, certainly, but it might save Anne. They

might never reach the Sheriff and his jury, let alone the High Court. The first thing he had to think of was the Fiscal. . . . If only he had not knocked Loutit down. It would do Anne no good when it came to the Inquiry. Still. . . .

The door opened again, on a tin tray. A sheepish young constable put it down on the plank bed, and the sergeant followed him in with a narrow flock mattress. "Ye'll tak yir supper, sir," he said firmly. "I ken ye're nae carin' for meat, but ye're needin' it. And I've brocht ye in a maittress fae the wife. Wir laddie's fae hame, and she said I wis tae bring ye in his yin. Ye'll nae be feart for it. The wife's a graund haun' aboot the hoose, and the cell wis limit* nae farder gane nor the morn. There's braw clean sheets." He put down the bundle, and sorted its contents dexterously. Gilbert, more out of courtesy than any desire for food, took the tray on his knees. There was bread and cold meat and cheese, and a pot of ale. He found, unexpectedly, he was very hungry.

* Whitewashed.

CHAPTER XXXV

" Knowing now that they would have her speak."
The Defence of Guenevere.

GILBERT put back a wad of blue pound-notes, and went out of the court-room—free, for the time being. The Sheriff, already dealing with a " drunk and disorderly," gave him a nod that was judicial but not unfriendly : he was a lean South-countryman, a Maxwell from the Stewartry, with a grey legal eye and a fighting reputation as an advocate. The charge was " assaulting an officer of police in the execution of his duty," and Gilbert pled guilty without further words. Sheriff Maxwell looked across from him to Loutit, regarded the latter slowly, up and down, in a manner that made him shift his feet a little, rubbed his hook nose with the handle of a pen, and said drily, " Ye're a Justice of the Peace, Mr. Keith. We'll say five pounds." His slight Border accent was more marked than usual, broadening the close Edinburgh vowels, but his voice and face were quite expressionless.

The lobby of the court-house was in shadow. Gilbert came out in bright cold April sunlight : the rain he had predicted to Isa Duncan overnight had come only in chill short showers, dried quickly by the harsh wind in between them. His law-agent Reid was with him, a small sandy man, whose kind red face was crumpled with gravity.

Reid talked, and he answered him rather at random. He wanted intensely to be home again, just at Kinnellan on a fine spring morning, before his father was dead and

these things had happened. The sight of the little Catholic church brought Anne to him: well, there was Anne. To have loved her was something, at least. Though he had not made much of it, for either of them. The instinct of fight awoke in him once more—cold dour resistance, though, not the heat of combat. He would save the last inch he might, in spite of circumstance, Loutit, and that snake of a girl. Unconsciously his shoulders came square again: his spirits rose as he turned into Reid's office.

Later he hired a trap and drove to Kinnellan. He was conscious of covert stares in Stonehaven streets, a head or two at a window: he set his face, and spoke once or twice to his driver of crops and weather. They met another gig in the green glen: a man in a lum hat—the undertaker. He lifted the hat with respectful professional sympathy, and stopped to assure Gilbert that all was in order. Gilbert wanted to ask word of Anne, but could not do it. He had had spasms of sick fear all night for the effect on a girl's nervous system of what Anne must have been through in the last three days, but to ask of one's mistress of the man who had just measured one's wife for her coffin was hardly possible. He swallowed his anxiety, touched the brim of his hat, and bade his driver go on.

He had expected Anne would be in bed, but to his relief she was up and in the drawing-room. The curtains were drawn, though not on the seaward window, and the unfamiliar light made the room strange. She sat by the fire with her hands holding each other. The pose made her look as if she had been set there by a photographer, warned not to stir while he arranged his lens. As he entered she neither rose nor spoke, only lifted her eyes. He wanted to cover them with his hand,

take her in his arms and comfort her into weeping, but stood halted instead, and it was she who spoke first, asking him, very calmly, what had happened.

He said, " I got off with a fine. Loutit's hoarse this morning, though. But you—— ? "

She said at once, " I am quite well. Katie has been very good. She stayed with me last night—she wanted to sit up, for she thought I was ill. So I made her get her nightgown and make a bed up. She tried to make me stay in bed to-day, but I wouldn't." She did not give him the reason—that she was " a pace and a half, say," from Bertha's body : she had chosen instead to sit in the curtained drawing-room, with Bertha's piano and sewing, the hyacinth glasses they had filled together, and Gilbert in the police cells in Stonehaven.

" Katie's a good soul," he said. " But you should not have risen. You don't look fit for it, and it wasn't necessary. The—this business with the Fiscal won't be for a day or two at any rate."

She knew that, and that she had no excuse for Katie's substantial company that night. She would be alone with Bertha in the tower : Taggart had prepared the King's Chamber for his master, and there would be no one nearer than Gilbert at the far end of the gallery. Her hands came a little tighter on each other. She looked up at Gilbert and spoke evenly. " Tell me what happened."

He did so, making much of the sergeant's thoughtfulness. " . . . Maxwell asked no questions at all. I fancy he knows Loutit pretty well. I just pled guilty, and you weren't mentioned. The whole affair was over in five minutes. I'd have been home last night if I could have got bail, but Loutit swore it was too late to bring out a magistrate." He shrugged. " I'm glad

Katie looked after you. She's a good girl. She deserves a rise in wages for the way she stood up to the police. I'll speak to Bertha—— " He realised what he had said.

Later, when Taggart came, he had to go and see her. The aloofness of death gave dignity to her face, that was uninjured. There was a bible beneath her chin to keep the jaw up, and her thick flaxen hair lay in two plaits. He remembered her in white on the day of their wedding . . . her kindnesses—he had been impatient often when she fussed him, and occasionally showed it. . . . She was dead now. He came back to that with a sort of surprise. He would never sleep on that bed by her again. Bertha was dead. She had the simpler rôle in the affair.

He turned to Taggart. " Yes. It's all been very well arranged, I think. Did you do anything about asking people ? "

" Aye, sir. I just sent the same as for the master. When—they took you to Stonehaven, I wired in your name this morning to the mistress's good-brother in Bon-Accord Street, asking him to break the news to her sister. I thought that was best, seeing I knew she was not long out of child-bed. I said to make it half-past two on Thursday."

" Yes. That will do very well." He wondered where he would be by the end of the week. And what in God's name they would do to Anne. He turned to Taggart. " Taggart, if there's — you know some queer things are being said about this ? If anything happens to me, look after Miss Anne. She hasn't a soul."

" I'll do that, sir." Taggart spoke sturdily.

He turned to Bertha again. Still, white, and rigid :

she had loved Anne, too—and anyhow, none of it was Anne's fault. He felt she would have expected him to kiss her : it was a husband's decent duty to his wife's corpse. He could not, and for the rest of the long day it plagued him more than the wrongs that he had done her.

CHAPTER XXXVI

" The changes undergone . . . and those to whom they are due, are known." *The Poetics.*

THE rest of the day dragged over, and the night. They were very long, and a queer silence had fallen. Nothing was real. He could not talk to Anne : he had nothing to say and she seemed to have as little. She was just a ghost, with great frozen dark eyes and the rest unsubstantial shadow. He began to be afraid that she would speak.

They carried out the ritual of meals, that day and the next : then in the afternoon Taggart came to him, and told him that the Reids were in the drawing-room. He went up and found Anne giving them tea, in an atmosphere of manufactured talk, attuned discreetly to the solemnities of a house of mourning. He took his necessary share in it, and received Mrs. Reid's condolences. She talked to Anne then, but turned to him again. " Mr. Keith—— " she said tentatively, and looked at her husband.

The latter took up the tale. " About Miss Ogilvie, now—— " He hummed impressively, and left it to his wife again.

" Yes ? " said Gilbert, and began to watch the two of them like a fencer with an unknown antagonist.

Mrs. Reid summoned up courage : she was a little mouse of a woman with tight brown hair and a very large gold locket set with onyx. The stick-ups of her bonnet were his torment in church. " We were thinking, Mr. Keith, that maybe Miss Ogilvie would like to

come and stay a wee while with ourselves just now, till you could arrange for a companion for her." It was obviously impossible, even without the scandal that blackavised quyne had sent round Stonehaven, that Miss Ogilvie could stay at Kinnellan without a chaperon.

Gilbert saw her meaning. The point had not occurred to him, but she was right. It might prove impossible, in the long run, to save Anne, but there was no sense in being reckless of forms : and in any event she was better away for a while. Those frozen dark eyes nearly broke his heart as he looked at her.

Anne spoke herself, very quietly. " You are kind, Mrs. Reid. I should be glad to come. I had promised to go and stay with some friends in Edinburgh, but someone is ill. I must go to them later, but if you will let me come to you until then, I shall be most grateful."

The old lady patted her hand. " Poor lassie ! " she said. " This has been an awful-like shock for you. You'll be needing a rest. I'll give you your breakfast in bed every morning, and you needn't rise until you like."

Anne smiled at her faintly. " Thank you very much. Yes, I am tired. I should be glad to rest."

Gilbert remembered himself, spoke phrases of thanks. It was undoubtedly the best arrangement. Plucky of Mrs. Reid, too : she was giving her countenance to Anne—he curbed some irrational anger at the fact. Katie was bidden to pack : Anne's trunk was to be sent after her to Stonehaven, and meanwhile she drove away in the Reids' dog-cart. He saw them all into it at the stable entrance, and watched the high bright yellow vehicle go through the tunnel of the gate and come into light again. A cloud of gulls rose from the side of the road, swooping and crying. Anne lifted her head, but she did not look back.

When they had turned from sight into the glen he walked up and down the garden smoking a pipe. It was a relief to be alone, with his mind empty, in this familiar place with the daffodils along the walls and a seagull watching him from the curb of the well. There were young frilled green leaves on the berry-bushes, and the light grew richer with late afternoon. The place comforted him like an understanding silence. He touched the weathered ashlar of the gable, then sat by the well and watched the waves breaking on Catteraw. A swim would be pleasant, but perhaps hardly decent—and anyhow, it needed more energy than he felt inclined to muster at the moment.

Besides, he must think. Bertha would be buried tomorrow. She was out of it, then, at any rate, poor soul. He and Anne had to see things through, whatever that meant. His obvious duty, of course, was to marry Anne, as soon as it might decently be possible. He told himself there was nothing he wanted more. It came nearest to undoing the wrong he had done her. She would expect it, and with every right. And afterwards, if he were cleared of this ? Bring her to Kinnellan ? He took the pipe out of his mouth and stared at it.

He dreamed of the garden that night, of wandering in it and touching the ashlar of the Tower again. Then he saw that the hewn stone bore two white breasts, with a strand of darkness lying in between them. He lifted his hand to cover them from the rain, and saw that the trail of darkness was drying blood. It clung to his fingers : he woke sick and shaken.

Soon after dawn he rose and put on a dressing-gown, went through the gallery and up the familiar turnpike

to his old room. One of the curtains had slipped back a little : a shaft of light struck inward in clear shadow, that was full of the heavy scent of white narcissi. The bed-curtains looped primly from the tester, and Bertha's head lay just half-way between them : they had taken the bible from under her chin.

He wandered about the place. It was frozen, orderly. The scent in the cold closed air was like a drug. He turned and went half-way down the stair again, then hesitated, went back, and passing the door came to Anne's. It was standing half open. He pushed it aside, but he did not want to enter : it was more dead than the other, though the seaward window, uncurtained, let in grey light. The bed under the canopy was smooth : there were silver candlesticks on the dressing-table, and a pincushion with lace frills and ribbon bows. Nothing of Anne. He recalled her lying there. . . . A flood of desperate tenderness came over him. She was just a child. He closed the door, and went back to the King's Chamber.

He got through the business of the funeral somehow. Anne was there, with Mrs. Reid. He had not expected that, and it gave him a shock, though he knew it was probably wiser than staying away. They had a few formal words, before the Reids. Mrs. Reid, since Bertha's sister was not there, played hostess to the little group of women, who talked in low tones, with glasses of sherry held in black kid gloves.

Later, he watched the cortège as it was forming. There were a good many men there, but he was aware too of absences, some of them men who never missed a funeral. He walked at the head beside Bertha's brother-in-law, who twittered uneasily, clearing his throat now

and then and glancing sideways. Gilbert wondered how much he had heard, and what he believed.

It was over at last, and the company dispersed. The brother-in-law had to catch an early train. It was Mrs. Reid who poured out tea, not Anne, and it seemed to mark her detachment from the household. Reid's groom drove the two ladies home in the yellow dog-cart : he saw them downstairs and into it, and went back to the house, to discuss the coming inquiry with Reid.

CHAPTER XXXVII

" Relevant to infer the pains of Law."
Interlocutor on the relevancy of Indictment.

He took Reid to the business-room, gave him a cigar, and lit one himself, though he would have preferred a pipe. The little man looked at him very soberly.

" I suppose you're aware, Mr. Keith, things are taking a turn that may be very serious ? "

" I gather that the police are suspicious, at all events. They seem to consider that I murdered my wife."

Reid held up a hand in horror. " We'll not say that. We'll hope it'll not be that at any rate. But I doubt ye're more nor likely to have to face an indictment for culpable homiceed."

" You think it *will* come to that, then ? "

" There's no saying. But I doubt it's more nor probable, Mr. Keith. There's a good chance of ' Not proven ' at the worst o't, for so far as I can learn—and ye may guess I have had my ears open—there's just the one witness that's likely to be of any use to the Crown. But the ill thing is, ye have just the one witness yourself."

" Miss Ogilvie ? I suppose we can't keep her out ? "

" Good guide us, Mr. Keith, that's just insanity ! Not to call her would be as good as pleading guilty. And if ye're for sparing the lassie compearing in court, if she isna there to depone on behalf of the panel,* she'll be there as sure as death as a Crown witness—they couldna omit her, though she'll give them little. She'll get an

* Prisoner on trial.

awful redding from the Crown Advocate, poor bairn, but she'd get that from your one the other way about."

Gilbert's jaw was rather grim. "They'll call Miss Duncan?"

"Oh aye. The case hangs on her, by what I gather. I can't get at the rights o't, Mr. Keith, but it appears she's some story of an intrigue between you and Miss Ogilvie."

Gilbert was waiting for that, and he did not blench, but damned her instead with some sincerity. "That would give them a motive, of course. Is that local gossip?"

"I couldna say. I doubt it will be by now! If there was any before, I never heard it—I give you my word on that. But if evidence is led to that effect, and we canna succeed in shaking her testimony, it might go a good way towards a case. The unfortunate thing is your attack on Loutit. They can make that byous ugly to a jury. They would put it that if you attacked him for referring to the story (I take it that's what he did, though if you'll forgive me saying it you werena just as candid as might be wished) you might maybe attack your wife for the same reason, even if it wasna to put her oot o' the road."

Gilbert took hold of himself. "He insulted Miss Ogilvie, and I laid him out. I suppose it was about the worst thing I could have done for her."

"If you'll forgive plain speaking, it's what it was. But they'll need more than they have, I doubt, for murder. So far as I can see they can't prove *dolus*. You see, you didna bring her to the place. We can easy prove that, I think. But culpable homiceed's another story."

"The same rope, though, I suppose, in either case?"

"No. It's not capital. And there's this to it. If it's murder, it's the High Court of Justiciary. If it's the other, it'll likely be the Sheriff, and with any kind o' luck, in Stonehaven itsel'. That means a local jury. They'll ken the witnesses."

"Does that make much difference?"

"They ken Cherlie Loutit! He's nae what ye would call preceesely popular. A good deal would depend on their foreman, but they'll guess, or they can be made to guess, I think, you might have an adequate reason for losing your temper, without an ill conscience over the affair. And if I may say so, Mr. Keith, ye're respected locally."

Gilbert laughed. "Well, that's a good thing, anyhow!"

"It may be a very good thing, Mr. Keith. It may amount to the difference between 'not proven' and 'not guilty'—or, at the worst, between 'guilty' and 'not proven.'"

"What's the likeliest verdict?"

"Well, to be frank with you, if you are brought up, we'll likely to have a job getting 'not guilty.' There's your own evidence if you choose to give it and stand up to a cross-examination: and there's Miss Ogilvie's. But if that Duncan lassie's story were true, ye see ye would both have strong motive for perjury, and there's your refusal already to speak of what you were discussing. I've warned you before, Mr. Keith, ye're making the case as black as possible by refusing to say anything on that. On the other hand, unless the quynie can support her evidence, we can say it's a maleecious fabrication. I take it she can't—that ye canna mind o' any suspeecious circumstance?" He looked hard at Gilbert.

Gilbert said calmly "No," and wondered then if it would be better for Anne to have told Reid the truth. But he would learn more first, at all events.

"What's the procedure?" he went on. "When am I arrested?"

"Good guide us, Mr. Keith, you take it lightly! It's very much a matter for the Fiscal. He'll take the precognitions of the witnesses, and if he thinks fit he can ask for a warrant. Or maybe he'll remit the report to Crown Counsel, and see what they instruct. If ye're apprehended, ye can please yoursel about emitting a declaration—the less said, likely the safer—and since it's nae *likely* to be the capital charge ye'll get bail till they can serve the Indictment. Do ye follow, Mr. Keith?" Gilbert was looking past him out of the window.

"I suppose there's no way at all of keeping Miss Ogilvie out?"

"There's no way of preventing her being called, nor of being examined by the Procurator-Fiscal. But there is a way of keeping her from court if ye're real set on it. And maybe it wouldna be the worst thing to do."

Gilbert sat up. "Good heavens, man, why did you not say that sooner?"

"It depends on the charge. If they bring it murder, ye just canna do it. If it's culpable homiceed, then, at the pleading diet, there'll nae be a jury——"

"I don't understand," said Gilbert impatiently.

"Aweel. Say ye plead 'not guilty'—ye canna plead 'not proven,' tee-hee-hee!—ye'll do so when ye're brought before the Sheriff at the pleading diet, and in that case ye'll be tried nine clear days later, the Fiscal conducting the case before a jury, and they'll call witnesses, who will certainly include Miss Anne——"

"Yes, yes, but I'm asking you——"

" Have patience, Mr. Keith. I'm explaining to you. That's if you plead ' not guilty.' But supposing you plead ' guilty ' in the first place, there's no occasion for a trial at all. The fact's admitted. It's for me as your solicitor to advance extenuating circumstances, as that you had no ill intentions to your wife, and werena considering she was standing where she was. I'll have to fight the Fiscal, but it's nae the first time ! In that case the Sheriff can inflict an appropriate penalty, fine or imprisonment, or even admonish the panel, though that's no' usual, and there's no further proceedings. If the Duncan lassie's tale is like to be awkward, it's maybe not the worst thing ye could do. But we'll think about it. Ye canna be apprehended yet at all events."

" Suppose I cleared out ? "

" Ye'd just be out o' your senses, Mr. Keith. Ye wouldna win the length o' Stonehaven station. The police wad see to that as a mere routeen, forbye that Cherlie Loutit has it in for you."

" I was only joking, Mr. Reid. I've not the least intention of making a bolt for it."

" Aweel, if ye can find anything humorous in a charge of homiceed or worse, it speaks well for your speerits ! Now I'd like to hear the substance of your precognition, for if it's the Sheriff Court, I'll be defending you, and I'll need to know just what you have admitted."

They hammered over that for the next hour.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

" To speak so indirectly I am loath."
Measure for Measure.

THE wind had gone east, with a cold and sleety rain. The half-fledged trees in the gardens shivered under it, and " Johnnie " Grant, the Procurator-Fiscal, cursed the weather between his teeth when his dog-cart came round. As a Glasgow man he had little right to do so, but the chilly East Coast springs touched his lumbago, and he swore again with richer variations as he drew the mackintosh rug over his knees. It was plain downright indecently inconsiderate of people to die suspiciously in this weather and drag an honest man over the country to take precognitions that were half misremembrance and the rest, as likely as not, hard steady lying. He expressed himself with fervour to his clerk, who having toothache, heartily concurred. The policeman in the back listened admiringly.

Luckily, there were not so many witnesses. He had the doctor's report in his bag beside him. The defunct was formally identified, Mrs. Bertha Elizabeth Hadden or Keith, late of Kinnellan. The cause of death was dislocation of the cervical vertebrae, which with other injuries appeared to have been produced by a fall from the cliff at the south end of Catteraw. The body when seen had been lying on the shore under the cliff, and was still warm. From its condition and the account of eye-witnesses, death had presumably taken place between six and six-thirty on Monday the fifth of April. News of the death was brought by Miss Anne Ogilvie, who had

witnessed the accident. Thus Dr. Armstrong, and the four eye-witnesses had now to be interviewed, the widower first.

Gilbert Keith was ready for him at Kinnellan. They walked out together, followed by the clerk, to the point on the cliff path where the fall had happened. He told his story straightforwardly enough, showing emotion only in his pallor. But it was not exactly what he had told Loutit.

"I was on my way home to Kinnellan, and overtook Miss Ogilvie. As we walked on together we met my wife, here. She was very much upset by a piece of gossip she had just heard, and got rather hysterical, with the result that she tried to throw herself into my arms. I was trying to quiet her, and put up my hand. I think she must have thought I was going to strike her, for she stepped back, and——" He had to swallow to control his voice.

The Fiscal glanced at his clerk. "Have you that down, Ritchie? You'll forgive me questioning you, Mr. Keith. I can understand this is not pleasant for you, but I'll need the details. What did you do then?"

"I looked over the edge and saw my wife on the shore. Then I climbed down, and Miss Ogilvie got the doctor. You'll have his report."

The Fiscal looked at the cliff. "You've a good head. Now—I'm sorry, but I'll need more details of the precedents. You say your wife was in an hysterical condition?"

"She was very much upset, at all events."

"You know what was troubling her?"

"Yes."

"What was it then?" The clerk was scribbling hard.

"She had just heard a piece of disturbing gossip."

"Did she acquaint you with the nature of it?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"That I had been unfaithful to her."

"She was jealous, then?"

"No. I mean she never had been."

"Was this the first time she had shown anything of the kind?"

"I don't think she ever considered she had cause."

"She had none?"

"No."

"Do you know what was the story she had heard?"

"I only know what she told me."

"What was that?"

"I thought another person's story wasn't evidence? But someone had told her I was unfaithful to her, and she—was rather upset about it."

"What did you say?" The Fiscal disliked the snub.

"Denied it, of course."

"Were you angry with her?"

"No, I don't think so. I was angry, but not with her."

"You did not strike her then?"

"Certainly not. Or not intentionally, at all events."

"But unintentionally?"

"I put my hand up, so, to check her outburst. She threw herself at me as I raised it, and struck against it. It may possibly have thrown her off her balance. I didn't realise how near the edge we were."

"She threw herself at you? Do you mean she assaulted you?"

"No. I think she was trying to put her arms round my neck."

"You didn't want that?"

"I didn't want her to go into hysterics."

"Quite so, quite so. Miss Ogilvie was with you all the time?"

"Yes. It wasn't more than a few minutes, I think."

"What was her part in the incident?"

"Nothing at all. I believe she brought the doctor, but that was after I had started to climb down."

"She saw the whole thing?"

"I suppose so. She was there, at least."

"I understood that was so. Well, I'll see her, of course. Will you read your notes, Ritchie?"

The clerk read over his notes, and they heard him out. Grant spoke. "You agree that's a fair account of your story, Mr. Keith?"

"Verbatim, so far as I know."

"Is there any detail you would like to add to it?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"You'd be willing to swear to it, if it were necessary?"

"Certainly. Do you think it will be necessary?"

Grant looked wise. "The accident was not in the course of employment, so there's no need for a Sheriff's inquiry. In the ordinary course of things you'd not be troubled again."

Gilbert wanted to ask if the course of things was likely to be ordinary, but thought better of it. Anne's turn was to come yet. His rôle was to show no anxiety.

Ritchie put up his note-book. They moved on.

"Now, with your leave, Mr. Keith, I'd like to have a few words with Miss Ogilvie."

"I'm sorry, she's in Stonehaven. Mrs. Reid was kind enough to ask her to stay with them until I could see about a companion for her." He flaunted that con-

cession to the conventions, and did not like himself for doing it.

Grant looked at his watch. "Well, well, since I'm here, I'll see Alexander Leslie. According to the police, he saw the thing. He's second horseman at Kinnellan Mains."

"You'll see him next? In that case your shortest road is by the field path there. It comes out among those trees behind the steading."

Grant took his leave and turned towards the Mains, and Gilbert was left to go home to his own house. When a dip of the path hid him he sat on a stone and wiped his forehead: he was trembling violently.

Alexander Leslie had little to say for himself, and most of that, being in broad Buchan Doric, was unintelligible to a Glasgow ear. But with Ritchie's help it got sorted out in time. He had seen Mrs. Keith come along the path from Kinnellan, as he himself was mending a gap in a dyke. A little later he saw her standing talking to her husband with another lady, but took no special heed. He was bending down for a stone when someone screamed, and he looked up and saw the other lady alone. She went to the cliff and looked over, and then a girl ran up and knelt by her. It was the schoolmistress from Skares. He ran to them. The schoolmistress was screaming, but the other lady got up and said Mrs. Keith had fallen over, and told him to bring help. He looked at the shore and saw a body lying, and Mr. Keith on the cliff and near the bottom. He had then run after the lady to the village, saw her ring the doctor's bell, and went himself to collect some other men and unship a gate. No, he had not seen Mrs. Keith fall over. No, he had heard none of the conversation. He had nothing

more to add when his story was read, and Grant climbed into his trap and went home to lunch.

He decided he would see Miss Ogilvie first, then drive out to Skares when the school scaled at four. He had heard some curious things from the police, but so far the course of affairs was peaceful enough. Being a middle-aged bachelor, he naturally heard any gossip that was going : and being a lawyer, believed so much of it as he felt inclined, which in a matter of this sort was not considerable. So far his instinct was that Keith was innocent : but he knew well enough that a man who would do no other crime in the calendar may be capable of murder on a sudden. He meant to get what he could out of the women, and hoped that neither of them would make a scene. But it did not spoil his enjoyment of sheep's head.

When the sheep's head and a pipe were pleasant memories he walked down to the Reids'. Miss Ogilvie was in—a small white slip of a thing in heavy mourning. She greeted him with a formal courtesy, slightly old-fashioned, and he approved her manners, and decided that she would not make a scene. She did not : she was perfectly composed. She sat with her hands in her lap and looked at him directly with grave dark eyes. The major points of her story tallied with Keith's.

" You say Mrs. Keith had heard a piece of gossip ? "

" Yes."

" Did you hear what it was ? "

" Yes."

" Well, Miss Ogilvie ? "

" Did he not tell you that ? "

" Mr. Keith ? He did, but I'm needing to have your story complete."

Her colour was rather deeper, but after all it was hardly a pleasant subject for a young girl. " Mrs. Keith had been told he—was unfaithful to her."

" On what authority ? "

" I don't know," she said. He noticed that she had a slight French accent. It had not struck him before.

" Do you know how she heard it ? "

" From Miss Duncan the schoolmistress, I understand."

" What was the story precisely, do you know ? " She was silent for a moment. He went on, " Did she make any specific charge against her husband ? Did she tell you who was said to be the woman ? " He felt rather a brute : Miss Ogilvie looked so young.

She swallowed, but did not look away from him. " Yes. Myself."

" Were there any grounds for the statement ? "

" No."

" Have you any idea how Miss Duncan might come to make it ? "

" No. I have only met her once or twice, for a few minutes."

" Had you heard of any tale of that sort before ? "

" No."

" M'm. What was Miss Duncan's relation with Mr. Keith ? "

" Relation ? " She was obviously puzzled. " None that I know of."

He suppressed the question he had in mind to ask her. If the Duncan girl was Keith's mistress, or cast mistress, as he was more than half inclined to consider probable, it was hardly likely his ward would know about it. He said instead, " You've no idea how the story was set going ? "

"No, none."

"Or why she should carry it to Mrs. Keith?"

Anne had, by this time: but as she hardly believed her own conclusions, she was about to say "None." Then she remembered that for Gilbert's sake she must fight Isa Duncan's story as far as she could, and answered, "She may have wanted to annoy Mrs. Keith."

"Mrs. Keith? Why that?"

"I think they did not like each other."

"Oh!" The Fiscal was a confirmed misogynist, and felt this sounded very probable. "Well, we'll maybe give her a chance of proving her statements. Do you feel a draught from that window, Miss Ogilvie?"

"Not at all, thank you. But it is rather cold."

"Yes—a vile windy place, the East Coast. When I retire, I'm going to Helensburgh. There's one thing more I have to ask you, Miss Ogilvie. I understand you declined to say anything to the Chief Constable of the conversation that had passed between Mr. and Mrs. Keith. Why was that?"

It was a moment before she answered, "I don't know."

"I'm afraid you must give a reason of some kind. Mr. Keith's refusal, of course, can be explained by what you have just told me. He would not like to bring a lady's name into the business, especially if the story were untrue." (How unbecoming black was to dark women: the girl's skin looked grey.) "But what was your reason?"

She sat up a little straighter. Her eyes had fallen, but she looked up again. "I was afraid of injuring him. If people believed the story was true, they might say he did push his wife over the cliff. And he did not, Mr. Grant. He's not a murderer."

"What made you think he might be accused of murder?"

"Mr. Loutit. He practically did accuse him. It seems that Miss Duncan said so to the police. Mr. Loutit hates him. I did not want to say anything he could twist."

"You'd have been wiser to speak out, all the same. Why do you say Mr. Loutit hates Mr. Keith?"

"It was evident. He tried to make him angry, so as to have an excuse for arresting him."

"That's rather a serious charge to make, Miss Ogilvie. Do you know of any enmity between them?"

"They quarrelled once."

"How do you know?"

"I was there."

"What was the quarrel about?" He looked at her keenly.

"Mr. Loutit tried—to make love to me once. I called out, and Mr. Keith came to help me."

"They had words?"

"I didn't hear what they said. Mr. Keith took me away."

"They quarrelled over you, then?"

She started, but answered calmly, "You might say that. Mr. Keith is my guardian, and he was very angry."

He nodded judicially, and paused a moment. "Well, is there anything else that you can tell me?"

"No. I don't think so."

"You'll be ready, of course, to repeat all this on oath?"

"Will it be necessary?"

"That's hardly for me to say. It depends on how much further the affair may take us. Well, well, Miss

Ogilvie, you'll forgive my troubling you. Reid was telling me you had been out of sorts. I'm glad to hear you're thinking of a change, though I doubt the West Coast would be more effective than Edinburgh. But it would be maybe as well if you were not to leave Stonehaven for a wee while, till we see what's to happen."

"You mean they'll—there is likely to be a trial?"

"I can't say that. But the thing's just possible. Well, well, Miss Ogilvie, I'll need to be going."

He was thinking hard as he drove over to Skares. If Keith and Miss Ogilvie had spoken the truth, well and good, though in that case he was sorry for them. But if the tale of an intrigue were true, it left things very precisely where they were. Keith might have intended to kill his wife or not: it was probably not premeditated murder, as he did not seem to have brought her to the place: but a sudden impulse to get her out of the road, especially if she had learned an awkward secret, a sudden black upheaval of anger against her. . . . On the other hand, the intrigue might be a fact, yet the death an accident. But Miss Ogilvie did not strike him as that kind of woman. Or they might be in love, yet innocent enough, in which case, being less prosaic than he liked to think himself, he was heartily sorry, for their marriage would be a disaster with this tale going—if Keith were cleared in court, which he began to consider rather dubious. "Not proven" was likely to be the best he would get.

He came to the school just as the bell was ringing. The schoolmistress greeted him with uneasy nonchalance, and visibly started when she saw from the window the big policeman left in charge of his horse. Her tale was that he had heard from the police. She had seen a

quarrel, seen Keith lift his hand and his wife fall over the edge.

"How do you know they were quarrelling, Miss Duncan?"

She tossed her head. "I could hear them."

"Oh—you were listening to the conversation?"

"I was sitting by the path. It's a public one. They came and talked close to me." Her black eyes outfaced him, staring defiantly.

"Could you hear what they said?"

"Mrs. Keith was screaming it over half the parish."

"A little less metaphorical, if you please. I suppose you mean she spoke loud enough for you to hear. Well, what did you hear?"

"She said he was carrying on with that Ogilvie girl."

"Who was 'he'?"

"Gilbert Keith, of course. He's always——"

"What exactly did she mean by 'carrying on'?"

"Just that he was, I suppose. Everyone knows——"

"Forgive me, Miss Duncan, but this is not very lucid. Do you mean she said Miss Ogilvie was her husband's mistress?"

"You can't expect a lady to use a coarse word like that, Mr. Grant."

"Did Mrs. Keith use it—or an equivalent?"

"She said Anne Ogilvie was no better than she should be."

"Did she use those words, or is that a paraphrase?"

"I don't remember exactly what she said."

"But you are sure that was the gist of it?"

"Oh yes. She——"

"Were you surprised?"

"I thought she was a besom, for all her airs."

"But was this news to you? Was that why you listened?"

"Well, I was surprised. You'd expect——"

"What did Mr. Keith say?"

"I couldn't hear him. I suppose he said she wasn't. He thinks an awful lot of thon white-faced thing."

"Was he angry?"

"Oh, awful angry. Those dark men have awful tempers."

"I'm not asking you for psychological generalisations, Miss Duncan. I'm wanting to know your grounds for telling the police Mr. Keith murdered his wife."

"I never told them."

"What did you tell them?"

"I never told them anything. I never went near them. At least I did, but I never said he murdered her."

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything—I can't remember. But I'm sure I never said he murdered her."

Grant's lumbago was not improved by a second drive. "According to the police report, you came into a shop in Kinnellan in screeching hysterics, and said Mr. Keith had thrown his wife over the cliff. Constable Angus, hearing of this at once, very properly drove over to Stonehaven, and informed the Chief Constable, who was fortunately on the premises, and you repeated your statement then to him."

"It was all that Ogilvie girl——"

"Who had hysterics? Pull yourself together, Miss Duncan. Either you saw Mrs. Keith knocked over or you didn't. Which? You've told the police she was. Was that not true?"

She began to sob. "You're awful unkind, Mr. Grant. I'm not used to being shouted at."

"I'm not used to shouting. And I'm not doing it now. I'm asking you a question. A violent death has occurred before witnesses, and it's my job to hear what you have to say. Unless you can get your story clearer than that, you'll get your kail through the reek from Keith's solicitor when he has you under cross-examination."

"But I've told you everything."

"You've told me a deal of havers. I want sense. And I don't want to stand in a draught with this damned lumbago. If there hadn't been a suspicion of foul play this business could have waited for next week, and I need not have been driving round the country in this infernal east wind. We'll begin again. You say you saw this affair?" She was silent. "Did you?"

"Oh yes. I saw everything."

"Very well. We'll have this clear, if you please. You say they quarrelled?"

"Oh yes. They were quarrelling like anything."

"Very well. We'll accept that. Then you say that the cause of quarrel was Mr. Keith's relations with Miss Ogilvie. How do you know?"

"I heard them."

"You doubtless listened very attentively."

"I couldn't help it," she said sulkily.

"M'm. Well, did you learn Mrs. Keith's source of information?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You're an educated woman, I presume, or you wouldn't have been appointed by the Board. Or don't they trouble? If you want it plainer, who had told her about her husband and Miss Ogilvie?"

" How should I know ? "

" You did not tell her yourself ? "

She looked wildly round. " What way would I be telling her ? "

" I would rather like to know, as a matter of fact. Do you deny that you were talking to Mrs. Keith just before ? "

She sat down heavily on the nearest desk. " Well, what if I was ? "

" She was perfectly calm and normal when you entered. As soon as you were gone, she was heard sobbing loudly, and then ran out of the house and quarrelled with a husband with whom she was previously on the best of terms. What had you said to her ? "

" Well, supposing I did, doesn't everybody know it ?"

" Know what ? "

" The way those two are carrying on together."

" I thought you didn't know until that quarrel ? "

" Oh, everyone knows the way they go riding about."

" A man can take a lady riding without being in love with her. Miss Ogilvie is a kinswoman of Mr. Keith's. Where did you hear your story ? "

" Oh, everybody knows."

" Who was it told *you*, then ? "

" How could I remember ? "

" The story was familiar to you, then ? "

" Oh yes."

" Then how was it a surprise when Mrs. Keith spoke of it ? "

" I didn't say I was surprised. I always knew."

The Fiscal swore, though decently under his breath. " Then you told Mrs. Keith ? "

" Well, she ought to know the way they were carrying on."

" Very charitable. Now we're beginning to get at it. You did tell Mrs. Keith her husband was Miss Ogilvie's lover ? "

" Well, he is."

" How do you know he is ? "

" Oh, everybody—— "

" Everybody be damned ! Tell me, categorically, on what evidence you make that statement. You may as well come out with it soon as syne, for they're certain to get it out of you in court."

" They'll no put me in jail ? Oh, Mr. Grant—— "

" You'll be there as a witness first, at any rate. You may get the jail afterwards if you don't tell the truth. Are you prepared to lift your hand to it and state on your solemn oath ' as you shall answer to God upon the great Day of Judgment ' that the statements that Mr. Keith and Miss Ogilvie are lovers and that he pushed his wife over the cliff are ' the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth ' ? "

" Mr. Grant, Mr. Grant, dinna be hard on me ! "

" I'm telling you for your good—and the sake of my own professional reputation. You'll have to depone on oath what you're saying to me just now—and to swear into the bargain that you have no malice or ill-will against the panel. Can you swear you have no malice to Mr. Keith ? "

" Mr. Grant, Mr. Grant, they'll no put me in jail ? "

" Not if you tell me the truth. And mind it *is* true. Who told you that those two people were lovers ? "

" I don't know—I don't," she wailed. She was mottled with terror.

" Did anybody ? Or did you make it up ? "

" Mr. Grant, you'll no be hard on me if I tell you ? You'll no let anyone put me in jail ? "

"You'd better tell the truth if you want to keep out of it. Did you make it up?"

"I just guessed it."

"I thought that! And you go and accuse an innocent man of adultery and murder on the strength of your own novel-ridden imagination! Well, there's no imprisonment for defamation of character, but if Mr. Keith brings an action for the same, you'll be in a bonny mess in the Court of Session. There'd be heavy damages for the pursuer."

"But it's true what I said. He *is* in love with her!"

"Good heavens, woman! You'll have me demented!"

Her pending hysterics went loose at the shout of that, and the Fiscal, when he got home to his own fireside, thanked Heaven more warmly than ever he was a bachelor.

CHAPTER XXXIX

" Now that we've done our best and worst——"
The Busy Heart.

A FEW days later Gilbert rode into Stonehaven. He met the Provost in the street and touched his hat, but could not be sure whether the man had seen him : the Provost was one of those who had not attended Bertha's funeral.

The Reids' house stood back from the road in a patch of garden, a douce little place of smooth granite and large bay windows, looking on borders yellow with daffodils. As he came in sight of it a horseman emerged from the back gate and rode away : with a queer flare of anger he recognised Archie Hailes. He gave his horse to the groom, and rang the bell. Mrs. Reid was out, but Miss Ogilvie would receive him. As he walked through the hall he wondered if he had been wise in coming. But to avoid Anne would be no less pointed. It was hard to gauge the natural thing to do.

He entered the small fussy drawing-room, and his spur caught a skin mat and dragged it after him. The door closed as he freed himself, and he faced Anne. She was very white and he thought she had been crying, and at that he forgot what he had intended to say, and came out with, " I saw Hailes as I rode up."

She started. " You—did he—did you speak to him ? "

" I don't think he saw me."

She did not answer that, and he was furiously annoyed with himself. Anne looked terribly frail, and

it curbed his anger somewhat. He took her hands, pushed her gently into a chair beside the fire, and sat down opposite, then got up again and stood by her in the middle of the hearth. He wished she would say something : it was impossible to know where to begin. He was wishing fervently he had not seen Hailes.

At last he achieved. " Anne—we'll have to settle now what's to be done."

She looked at him slowly and sighed. " Yes, I suppose so."

He plunged into the middle of it then. " It's pretty obvious I can't marry you yet—not openly, at least."

She winced, and a stain of colour showed on her cheeks. " This is Tuesday, I think."

" What has that got to do with it ? "

" Well—it is just five days since Bertha was buried."

He swore under his breath : then aloud, and patiently enough, " I know that, Anne." He sat down so as to be nearer on her level. " I'm not likely to forget what I have done to her. That's past mending now. But there's you. I haven't done any better by you that I know of. And I want to know—what I can do about it, for it seems I'm not likely to have to stand a trial now."

She gave a kind of sob, and looked at him, but he was staring at the ornate brass fire-irons.

He went on, " You know I'll marry you—— "

" No," she said suddenly and violently.

He sat up and stared at her. Then, " Oh—then it's Hailes ? "

" He ? *No !* He asked me, just now, to marry him at once. I wouldn't. I told him why."

" You told him—— "

" Not everything. I was going to do that. Then I thought it wasn't fair to you. I told him I loved you."

He was not expecting that. "You told him—that? Then—it's true, Anne? You will marry me, then?"

"No," she said again. "Oh yes, it's true I love you. I suppose I'll always do that. But to let you marry me——"

"But, Anne, don't you see I must?"

"I see that you must not." Unconsciously she had put her hand upon his sleeve. "Gilbert, don't you see it's impossible now? You can't."

"I can and I will. Why not? You say you love me."

"I do. But that isn't everything. Don't you see——"

"I do see, and—oh—— Are you afraid I don't love you, Anne?" His hand was on hers, the life coming back to his face. "Dear heart, you know I do. You don't doubt that? You don't think—you haven't taken it into your head that I'm only doing this to—to——"

"To make an honest woman of me?"

"Anne!"

"Well, isn't it true? Dear, I don't doubt you love me. I can't help being glad of it, even now. I'll be always glad of it. But—it won't do. We can't."

"Why not?" Though he had a cold inkling of some reasons.

"People would say——"

"Damn people!" he said viciously.

"They'd say that girl's story was true—that you did kill Bertha."

"Do *you* believe I did?"

"No, no!" she cried.

He said bitterly, "I can see that a reputed murderer is not the best matrimonial bargain you could find——"

"Gilbert! Oh, don't! You know I know the whole thing was me. If it hadn't been for me it couldn't have happened. You know it too. That's why I can't—or one reason. People won't believe now you did it, but if I let you marry me, they will."

"Let them! So long as you don't," he said recklessly. The colour had come back to her cheeks, her eyes were burning, her breast heaved stormily in the tight black gown, and quite suddenly he was flooded with desire to feel her living in his arms again, to lose himself in remembered fragrances. A wave of disgust succeeded to the impulse. There'd been enough of that.

She had seen his eyes, and flung her hands out with a despairing gesture. Sobered, he put an arm gently about her, and she knew at the touch she could submit in safety, and turning, leant her forehead against his coat. He stood holding her very carefully, tortured with pity.

For a few minutes neither of them moved: then suddenly she reached up and drew his head down to her, lifting her face. As he kissed her he felt her sob: then she stood away, and he knew with a pang of certainty what she meant.

"Good-bye, my dear," she said, and left the room.

He watched the door close, picked up a china cupid from the mantelpiece and fingered it vaguely: put it down, let himself out, and found his horse.

CHAPTER XL

" After swich gift is good resoun
He yeve his good in abandoun."
The Romauns of the Rose.

For some days then he did not go near Stonehaven. It was better to leave Anne alone for a while, he thought. The child had been through intolerable strain, and the man who had let her in for it in the first place was better out of her road till she recovered. His intentions were quite unchanged about marrying her. Elementary honesty required it, to begin with : not only that. . . . There was no doubt he loved her. But just now it would be easier for both of them that for a little while they should stay apart.

If it were possible. She began to haunt him. She would not come in his dreams, but a ghost slipped out of reach as he wakened from them. When he entered a room it seemed she had just left it, and the warm spring rain on his cheek was like her hair. Yet he was paralysed. He could not call to her. If he spoke, the words must be a barrier. She was lost, haunting him so.

He hardened his will, and tried to tear the shadows. He would marry Anne : that was tangible and certain. It behoved him to do that. . . . And bring her to Kinnellan ? She was right in what people would say. Well, the Keith motto. It was over his head in the dark, on the oak bed-canopy. *" Thay haif said. Quhat say thay? Lat yame say."* Earl George was entirely right. So let them say. " He murdered his wife so as to marry his mistress. . . ." Nonsense !

His friends would never believe that. The others did not matter. Face it out. He might go abroad, perhaps. No: no, most certainly. He would not give up Kinnellan for evil tongues. The old Tower stood, and he was master of it.

Bertha's ghost stirred. "I promised you an heir, too." He had brought her to her death, and perhaps her child. His own too—a good deal more his own than hers: he knew precisely enough what he had sought from her. Well, Bertha was dead, whether or not she could call him her murderer. If the living called him that, he would face it out, go to kirk and market, confront them——

With Anne? "He murdered his wife to marry his mistress." He could face their saying that, but would they say also, "Her lover murdered his wife to marry her?" Had he the right to ask her to bear that, even for the reparation of marriage, and if she loved him?

A stiff south wind blew, over a rising tide. He lay staring at the familiar murmuring darkness for long before the solution came to him. Marry Anne and sell Kinnellan. He almost cried out: it was monstrous, unthinkable. Part with Kinnellan? The place was himself: it had bred him and he had lived for it. His memories of it crowded, good years and bad, ripe fields and crops laid with tempest, stacks under thatch at last and a plough with gulls crying after it, the chains jangling as the great sober beasts turned at the headland. And the Tower from the sea as he swam under the cliffs.

He thought of Anne, and the scales tipped and went down. There was no choice. He knew what he had to do. See Reid in the morning. . . . A sudden revulsion made the place achingly dear: it was impossible he could let it go. He got up and lit a candle to let him

see it, lit those on the chimney-piece and dressing-table. He knew every single figure in the tapestry : he had sat there by the fire in his father's illness, rebelling at Fate that imprisoned him from adventure. Those days were far now. He had longed to leave the place then, although he loved it—to leave and return, when he had seen the world. Then in time he had been contented not to go.

He wandered about the room till the candles were pale, blew them out, and watched the sun come from the sea.

He wrote to Reid before he had his breakfast, and was pouring out tea when Taggart brought his letters. One envelope had writing he did not know, that yet was familiar somehow. He puzzled over it, then opened and looked at the signature inside. It was "Anne Ogilvie." He began to tremble. It was a moment before he could read the contents.

She began without formal appellative :

"I am going to Edinburgh. Father Cameron had written, before he was ill, to the Superior of the Ursulines in Whitehouse Loan. They take boarders, and it is not expensive, as I can work in their embroidery-room. He sent me the Reverend Mother's reply by his housekeeper, after I had seen you. So I am going to-morrow. I shall post this on the way to the station.

"Father Cameron says that to go into Religion for anything but the love of God is running away. But I think there is another reason as well—to make reparation for what one has done, or caused others to do. I think if one causes other people, whom one loves, to do wrong, one is surely allowed to take some part

of the penalty, if one really wills it. It seems only fair. So I am going to the Carmel at Léry, if they will have me.

" My dear, I do love you. Don't doubt that. But it isn't possible that we should marry. I think you will have seen that now. I've hurt you too badly. That you forgive me I am very sure—you'd never be anything less than generous. But it is not so easy to forget. Besides, you can fight it out if I don't hamper you. I want you to do that.

" I will see you again if you wish it, but it will be easier for us both if you don't come.

" May God be good to you, my dear.

" ANNE OGILVIE."

There was a postscript. " I have not told Mrs. Reid about the Carmel. She has been very kind, but even the Ursulines shock her a little, though she agrees it is best I should leave here."

She did not tell him of two girls who had passed the garden, stared and giggled, and gone away with backward looks, whispering together : nor of a meeting with Loutit as she came from Mass. But he divined some of their effects in that last sentence, and his face darkened. Then he read through again.

He drew a hand over his forehead at last, and went to the window. Anne was gone, then. Forgiveness ? Well she knew that, nor was he less sure of hers. But forget ? That cut both ways. She was probably right. She could not forget what he had dragged her into. She would have peace among the nuns, at any rate. He wondered vaguely why she had spoken of Léry, and concluded, not knowing one Order from another, that he had made Scotland hateful to her now. Anne, shut up

behind stone walls in a serge habit : he remembered her leaning laughing to a strong wind, her small composed face as she took a fence, or dancing with him, slight and self-contained, her own mistress. . . . Anne, obedient in his arms. But she had chosen : this was final enough. She was doing what she could with what he had left to her—and had bidden him fight. That meant staying at Kinnellan.

With Rab at his heels he went into the business-room, and sat down to a reply. " Anne, my dear——" he wrote, and stared at the words a long time before going on.

" It's for you to choose. I cannot interfere. I've lost any right I had. I'll ask you to forgive—or I know I need not ask. But you'll hardly forget, and I suppose you are right about the rest of it. I can hardly think I would make you very happy. I love you, but that is not enough to go on.

" Yes, I'll see it through. I would have liked to see you again [he wondered if that were true : it did not seem to matter very much], but if you think it better I will not come. You'll be of age in June. I'll send all your papers then. I suppose I had better administer things till then. I wish you would let me help you. It is very little for a lady to live on, and I suppose you can't be a nun just yet ? Would you like me to transfer it to French securities ? It is in consols now, and that may be awkward if you are in France."

He read over what he had written. It was not satisfactory, but he could think of nothing else to say. He added " God bless you," and signed, then put it in an envelope, wrote the address, and tore up the letter he had written before breakfast to his lawyer.

CHAPTER XLI

" Depart, depart, depart—— "
The Lament of the Master of Erskine.

APRIL went out, and a cold May followed it. The fields were in squares of different coloured green, the trees half-leaved, on the cliffs the innumerable gleam of primroses. They passed to warm airs and summer and full leafage, the tide changed on the rocks, ebbing and flowing, the gulls cried round the Tower and the flag flew high on it. Nothing was altered from the spring before, except that Gilbert slept in the King's Chamber, and ate his meals alone in the dining-room. Taggart seemed older too, and the house was quiet.

He came and went as he had been accustomed to do, riding about his business in Stonehaven, seeing to his farming, sitting alone in church—the last was the worst, for he had to face the women, and if their gossip was itself no worse than the men's he felt more helpless in the face of it. But nothing happened very openly. Some people refused to see him, but they were few. Others, again, were heartier than usual, greeting him with defiant ostentation. But most were normal, save for a glance occasionally, and it was difficult to know how much of that might be imagination.

No one came to the house, except Reid on business. Since he had left the University he had had no intimate friends except his father. Archie Hailes came nearest, and Archie, within the limits of civility, avoided him as far as might be possible. Gilbert bore no resentment, but the change in the boy's face hurt him a good

deal: he was grey and haggard. Later there were vague rumours of a violent quarrel between him and Loutit: there were no witnesses to the affray, but Archie had come home with a black eye and a broken riding-whip, and Loutit had a week's leave, for influenza. Gilbert slept worse for some nights after that.

May dragged to June. He had not heard from Anne, save for a formal receipt for her quarter's income, she had sent Reid, through whom he had forwarded it. He had not written. But now it was near the day of her majority: he had to make over her affairs to her own control. Reid had recommended him to a man in Edinburgh, who could arrange affairs when she went to France. He got the papers in order, retied and docketed them, and for half an hour sat over a blank sheet, for a letter of some kind would have to be enclosed with them. He had achieved a phrase at last when the door opened, and Taggart came in.

"A gentleman to see ye, sir."

He gave an exclamation of annoyance. "Damn! Who is it?"

"It's a minister, sir. He didna give his name."

Gilbert sat up. Were the Presbytery on his trail, then? He braced himself wearily for an unpleasant interview, put Anne's papers in the safe, and went upstairs, thankful for both his own sake and the Doctor's their emissary was a stranger and not Dr. Dishart. But it might be only a subscription, after all.

A big man was looking out of the drawing-room window. He swung round to face the door. It was Father Cameron. Gilbert's heart did something queer and he half halted, then recovered and came forward to greet his guest.

"How d'ye do, sir? Won't you sit down?"

The priest ignored his hand. "No, thank you," he said. "I would rather stand for the present, Mr. Keith." The wise old eyes looked very hard at Gilbert.

He returned their scrutiny with calmness enough, but inwardly was angry and unhappy. All that he knew of the old man he respected: and it seemed he did not come in friendliness.

They stood a moment measuring each other. Then the priest spoke. His pleasant Highland voice had a stern ring in it. "I left Edinburgh this morning, Mr. Keith."

Gilbert started in spite of himself, but said nothing. The other went on, "I had gone up to see Miss Ogilvie. Mother Felicitas had written for me."

"*What!* Is she ill?"

"No—or not now, at least."

Gilbert looked at him once, then turned to the mantelpiece, and picked foolishly at a tassel on its edge. The priest saw his face, and his own eyes grew kinder.

"She's not dead, if that's what you think." Gilbert swung round. "It might be better for the poor child if she were."

"Speak out, man, for God's sake! Tell me what has happened. If those women have turned her out——"

Cameron lifted a hand. "To speak out is exactly why I came. I'm meddling in your concerns, without authority. But that lassie, after all, is my concern as a priest. What are you going to do about her?"

"What can I do? She's going to be a nun."

"No. I believe she means that. But it's not possible."

"You mean they'll refuse her—Anne? She's——"

"One moment, Mr. Keith. She told me you had asked her to marry you."

" I did. I'd do it to-morrow. But she won't. She told me her reasons and I believe she's right."

The priest looked hard at him. " Did she tell you all of them ? "

" How do I know ? She made it clear enough."

" By what I can judge of men, Mr. Keith, I fancy it hasn't struck you she knew that marrying her would certainly mean, in the long run, losing Kinnellan."

" Good God, she never said that ! Besides, I was prepared to sell the place. I was going to America. I couldn't have brought her here, for her own sake."

" I think she was aware you would feel that. She'd face it herself, I dare say. That child has courage. But she knew you would leave rather than see her do it. I fancy, though, that's your best course—to start afresh."

" You mean—has she sent you to say—— "

" She did not send me. She was resolute, when I saw her, not to marry you. But there's a factor you can't be aware of : it seems she does not know of it herself."

" What do you mean ? "

" Mother Felicitas wrote to me two days ago. I'd told her nothing of Miss Ogilvie, except that it was desirable she should leave. Now—well, the lassie's with child. She thought I could do something with the father."

Gilbert sat down and was silent. Then he rose to his feet. " Is she sure ? I mean—a nun—— "

Father Cameron smiled. " A nun isn't born in a coif. Mother Felicitas had three of her own—she's my cousin, as a matter of fact. She buried them and her husband the same week, in the big 'flu epidemic twenty years ago."

" Anne doesn't know ? "

"She can't. She talked to me about the Carmel. Well—you see. The Reverend Mother will be good to her. But——"

"She hasn't told Anne?"

"She won't till she hears from me."

"She needn't then. I'm going to Edinburgh. Anne won't take help for herself, but—this is different."

The priest's eyes blazed. "Your help? You'd offer her money?"

"Be damned to you, no! I beg your pardon, sir." He stopped. "Will she let me now, even?"

"She mightn't for her own sake. But—well——"

Gilbert looked at the clock. "The three-ten from Aberdeen stops to lift at Muchalls. I'll get that. Will they let me see her to-night, do you think?"

"I'll give you my card for Mother Felicitas." He scribbled a line on it, and held out his hand. Gilbert saw him out and shouted to the stable, and went upstairs at a run to pack a bag.

As he mounted the curve of the spiral he slackened his pace, realising, with a heavy suddenness, how familiarly his hand had gone to the stone rail: it was channelled in the smooth ashlar of the wall, and one of the earliest things he could remember was his delight in letting a ball roll down it. He went slowly through the drawing-room and the gallery. The windows were standing open to the air: he tasted its salt as if he were a stranger, and heard the rustle of sea far down on the rocks.

II

THE FALLING WIND

To

DR. ANNA BROMAN

in poor acknowledgment of the skill and kindness that made it possible for it to be written.

CHAPTER I

" What ableness have you to do her right then ? "
Women beware Women.

TOWERS on a rock on the far side of the water : the sun of mid-June was swinging to the north, and Gilbert Keith, looking downward from the train, saw the Firth of Forth with a green-blue glint on it, in a light that seemed to strike upward through the air. He bit on a cold pipe and stared in front of him, his dark face dour in the pleasant early evening, till the train stopped with a jolt at the Haymarket station, and an inspector brusquely demanded his ticket.

Two minutes more, and he had arrived in Edinburgh. He put his bag into the station cloakroom, went up the Waverley Steps in a streaming crowd, past the scaffolding of the big new Station Hotel, and made his way, rather slowly, through the streets. It was eight when he reached the blind door of the convent. The light came low between placid square stone houses, and the sky was changing colour above the trees. The clang of the bell had no answer for a while : then he found himself regarded through a grating. He raised his hat.

" Can I speak to the Superior ? " he said. " I come from Father Cameron of Stonehaven." He lifted the priest's card till the eyes could see it, and the Sister Portress answered, a little doubtfully, " The Reverend Mother is at Compline just now." A singing of women's voices came from behind her.

He said, " I can wait, if it is necessary. But I should be grateful if she would see me to-night. Father

Cameron thought she would." He clung instinctively to the idea of the priest, who priest or not, was a man at all events. The thought that he could only deal with women, in an affair of such intimate importance, troubled him, who had little to do with them, and also his Presbyterian upbringing made a convent feel rather unnatural as well.

The Sister Portress knew Father Cameron, and liked him, and the swarthy face that leant towards her grille had more distress in it than its owner knew. The door came open with a clank of the chain.

" If you will wait in the parlour till Compline is over, I will ask the Reverend Mother . . . if it is urgent. . . . "

Keith answered no more than " Thank you," and followed her in. The chain of the door clanked heavily behind him, and he followed the pad of her soft heelless shoes through a short flagged passage. The singing still came in gusts.

The convent parlour was a little room, with a table of aggressive varnished pine, a polished linoleum floor, and a smell of soap. The sun was not down, but it was nearly dark : the Portress reached a big box of Swedish matches, and lit the single gas-jet over the fireplace. Its unshaded light, in what was left of evening, was sickly on walls of a pallid buff distemper. Then she went out : the door closed very quietly, and he was left to the four walls of the room, a wooden crucifix over the mantel, the table and oilcloth and the horse-hair chairs, and a shiny photograph of a Madonna that was going a little yellow round the edge.

He sat down after a while on one of the chairs, and stared at his bowler hat upon the table, not thinking at all, in a sort of dumb expectancy. He knew what he must do next, at all events, and the issue of the business

lay with Anne. But what she would have to do was sufficiently clear, and his mind refused to consider over again what it was going to mean to either of them.

He heard the chanting voices for a little, then gradually became aware of silence. In a while the parlour door reopened quietly, there was a swish of heavy serge at his side, and he found himself looking into clear grey eyes, set in a stern fine face between folds of linen. He rose to his feet and bowed. The nun's starched coif inclined a little in answer, and he saw she had Father Cameron's card in her fingers. He could read the message scrawled in pencil across it: "Will you see Mr. Keith immediately, if possible?"

It was she who spoke first. "I am Mother Felicitas. The Sister Portress says that your business is urgent. This is a late hour for us to receive a visitor, but if you were sent to us by Father Cameron——" The level grey eyes looked into his without wavering, but instead of disconcerting him their directness gave him a sense of considerable relief. This woman would fight with recognisable weapons, and if she was—as was likely—hostile towards him, it would be because she was protecting Anne. She would do her best for Anne: and she was no fool.

He was slow in answering, and the clear voice came imperious again: her trace of Highland accent was like the priest's. "If you would be good enough to tell me what you want, Mr. Keith——"

He said then, "You know, I think. At least you may guess I come about Miss Ogilvie."

The firm mouth seemed to grow sterner: her eyes did not change. "Miss Ogilvie is boarding with us. Yes?"

He almost smiled. She was taking no chances for Anne, and would not risk giving anything away. And

naturally he would seem a cad to her—not without reasonable justification.

He blurted out then, "I have come to marry her. If I can make her marry me, that is."

Her eyes were expressionless. "I beg your pardon?"

"You can be frank," he said. "I have had your message. I take it you were not likely to be mistaken, and I came down before you could tell Anne."

"Oh, then——"

He took the words out of her mouth. "He told me she was going to have a child. Well—it's my child. I've come down to marry her."

The nun threw back her veil: her eyes were blazing. "It's that to you, is it? You'll come to her now!"

He did not blench at the flame of her contempt, but smiled wearily. "Yes, I suppose it looks like that."

"That bairn!" she said. "She's the makings of a saint. And the only alternative you leave in front of her—A marriage on these terms may be better than shame, but the blessed saints may forgive me if I wonder! And it's yourself that wrecked the lassie, it seems?"

"Yes," he said, and no more: but she grew less fierce.

"You've an honest face—that's the queer thing. I would trust you, and I've always thought I was a judge of faces."

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. "She trusted me. Indeed, I trusted myself, for the matter of that. And—God knows what she'll feel now. But I love her, anyway."

The nun stared at him. Pity was fretting at her anger, but she would not let it get the better of her. She could be very gentle to the repentant, but her hand was like iron against deliberate sin: she had never

believed that Christ's " Forgive your enemies " meant " Forgive the enemies of other people," especially when those others lacked defence.

Keith stood her scrutiny, with an indifference she did not misunderstand. His lean high-cheekboned face was old in the lines for a man of still a little less than thirty, the mouth beneath the clipped moustache was drawn, and signs of sleeplessness lay about the eyes. He still said nothing—because, it seemed, he felt there was nothing to say: and she seated herself in one of the horsehair chairs, and motioned him to another. He took it mechanically, and sat facing her, his stick still in his hand, waiting apparently for her to speak.

" I had better hear your story, Mr. Keith."

" I thought you knew it."

" I know some of it. But I am inclined to think there is more than I know. That child is not one of our community, but I am responsible for her while she is here. And neither you nor she fit into the facts."

" What do you want me to tell you ? You know her."

" Yes. That is why I must know something more. Especially as—I'll tell you this much frankly—you're not the kind of man I expected to see. All that I know is that she came here in April, to stay till she could consider her vocation to the Order of Mount Carmel. I took her in, and as far as I saw it was no case for interference—and I'd not pass everyone for a Carmelite novice. I was sorry she hadn't chosen our own Order—I'd have liked her here, although she would hardly make a teacher, I think. But of course she had to decide that for herself. She talked of going soon, and I did not discourage her. I'd written for her to the Prioress at Léry. One of our sisters goes to Paris shortly, and they were to travel together. I'd

arranged with the Ursulines in the Rue du Bac to put her up—well, that doesn't matter now."

He sat facing her, woodenly, and she sighed and went on, her clear incisive voice very quiet and even. "A little while ago she began to be ill. It didn't seem that a doctor was necessary. I just thought she had been fasting more than was good for her, and upset her digestion. Novices do have trouble that way at times. So I asked her some questions, and then—well, I had to ask her a few more. I simply couldn't believe the thing at first. Not of that child. But I couldn't be mistaken. I'm a widow myself, and I once had bairns of my own. And it was perfectly clear she didn't know either what was wrong or what I was asking her. Well, what could I do? She couldn't go to France, and I couldn't keep her here, for her own sake. So I sent for Father Cameron. I knew that he had been the lassie's confessor. I could see he knew more than he'd say, but I couldn't ask questions—he'd evidently had the thing in confession. He said he'd see to it, and I had to leave it."

"He came to me yesterday. No, this afternoon. But that doesn't matter. He said you'd said nothing to her."

"No. I wouldn't do that until I knew something further. Something about the man, at any rate."

He gave a painful smile. "Well, he's here in front of you." The sardonic smile changed suddenly to appeal. His speech was tripped by not knowing how to address her: he stammered over the missing appellative, and blurted out, "You're a woman, and—well, you love her. I can see that, and it's certainly not much wonder. What am I to do? She's refused to marry me."

She gave him a keen glance, and was convinced. "I believe that you're an honest man, Mr. Keith. Though that lassie was in your keeping, as your ward. Yet if she fell out of mere lust or lightness, I'm no judge of a woman—and I have to be that. And yet you are free to marry her, it seems."

"They say I killed my wife to be free for that. Oh, it's not true—at least that it was for that. I killed her, certainly. Whether I meant to or not is more than I know. I hardly think so, but it's possible. She called Anne—names. And we were by the cliff."

"You mean you struck her?"

"I pushed her away—she tried to cling to me. She went over. Some people think I murdered her. There are others who don't believe it. I don't know myself."

"Does Miss Ogilvie know?"

"Yes. She was there," he said, with a crooked smile at the nun's face of horror. "I don't know what she believes—whether I did the thing on purpose, I mean. She says I didn't. I don't know what she believes. The Fiscal apparently thinks they couldn't prove it, for they never brought me to trial, at any rate."

Mother Felicitas had recovered herself. "I think you had better tell me the whole story. I want to help you—both of you—if I can. But it's clear I don't know enough to go about it. Will you begin at the beginning, please, and explain how matters come in this condition? For the more you tell me, though I believe it's the truth, the less I understand about the thing."

"You'll do what's best for her? She's not to blame. And I'd have burnt my hand off before I hurt her.

But I wasn't man enough, apparently. Well——" He broke off, considering where to begin. "You know she was my father's niece, I suppose, or at any rate his wife's, and brought up in France. The aunt she lived with died, and she came to us—last September, that's all." He stared at the polished oilcloth, and the Reverend Mother waited for him to go on. "Well—you know what she's like. We all got fond of her. She was—young, somehow. She used to sing in the evenings. I taught her to fence." He made an impatient movement. "That doesn't matter. After a bit—it was last January—I found I loved her. I hadn't loved my wife—oh, I was fond of her, honestly enough. She's a good soul—she was, I mean. Kind—all that. She was good to Anne—the two of them were friends. They used to be about the place together. I'd always felt I ought to be happy enough. I didn't believe the stuff that's in the books."

The nun had made no comment, but he looked back at her: he had been staring past her at the linoleum. "You'll say it was a curious kind of love. You're right. But I honestly did try to go straight. At least I never thought of doing anything else. I wouldn't have told her—come to think of it, I don't believe I ever did tell her I loved her. Not till after, anyhow. This went on for weeks. About seven weeks. It doesn't seem long now. But she was about the place all day, and at night——" He broke off, then went on. "There was another man, too, at the time. A damn sight better man (I beg your pardon) but I was cur enough to be crazily jealous, though when I was sane I wanted her to take him. He'd have made her happy. I—I'd nothing for her. Though I didn't think that there was any danger.

"My father was dead by this time. I think he guessed, so that's to my account, very likely, as well. I don't know how long the thing would have gone on —I suppose I'd have stood it out till she married Hailes. I never thought of *her*—of—anything. It might have gone on for—well, in fact, it didn't. There was a gale one night—Bertha's sister was hurt, and they sent for her to come to Aberdeen. I took her to the station, and coming back, there was a wreck—a Dutch ship on the rocks. It's a bad coast, you know, in a north-easter, and the March full tides were running strong as well. The Stonehaven lifeboat wouldn't have been any good. We'd to get a rope out—we just managed it. I swim pretty well, and I know the place, you see. I've thought that perhaps that had something to do with it. I mean—There'd been nothing I could do that mattered, and then, in that sea. . . . I think it went to my head." He paused, trying to sort his facts intelligibly. "We went home after that, about two o'clock in the morning. She'd come down from the house—I'd sent up for whisky and blankets. Oh, she was plucky—she went round with the doctor. Three or four of them were badly knocked about. Just held the candle and carried out Armstrong's orders, with a face like a ghost, and as steady as you please. She'd her hands all over blood, and she never quavered." He was staring again at the shadows beyond the table, speaking rather to himself than to his hearer. His even voice ceased for a little while, and the room was completely still. Then he looked up, recalling again the purpose of his remembrance. Anne had to be cleared. . . .

His face hardened, and he went on. "I swear all the same I'd no notion of telling her. I'd never

guessed. . . . She didn't know, I think. Not until then. Well—we did know. There it was. It never struck us there was anything wrong." He looked at the nun. "That's queer, but it's true, before God. I'll answer for her, and I think I can for myself."

She inclined her head, and her face was more mournful than stern. "Yes. I believe you."

He went on, without heeding her. "We got home, after that. Yes, I remember thinking about the wreck. We should have been—awake, in another minute. At Kinnellan, I mean—our ordinary selves. Seen what had happened. But there was nobody there. And the lamp in the hall blew out as we came in. If I'd thought of lighting it again—but I didn't. And it simply didn't occur to me to leave her." He struck his hand against the edge of the table. "The whole thing was my fault. Remember that. She didn't—she knew nothing. Even to me, it was all—oh, perfectly natural, just then. I suppose that sounds pretty ghastly when one says it. But it's true enough. Well—we did know in the morning. We were both played out enough to sleep at once."

It was chilly in the little plastered room, but he rubbed the sweat from his forehead before going on. Mother Felicitas had drawn her rosary over her knees, and her fine strong fingers linked about the cross. He could not gauge what she thought, but a reticent man, once unleashed, finds it hard to stop: his story went on, in odd alternate gouts of speech and halting.

"We talked it out, after breakfast. Oh yes, we had breakfast, sat facing each other in the dining-room, and old Taggart in and out with the hot water. I'd have gone away, but what was the use of that? We'd have had to tell Bertha then—well, what was the good? It

wasn't her fault. I suppose she'd have divorced me, but Anne and I—well, she saw it wouldn't do.

" We just let things slide. We could do nothing else, but simply behave as if the thing hadn't happened. I know now, of course, that Anne meant to go away, and if Father Cameron hadn't gone down with pleurisy, she'd have managed it sooner."

" One moment, Mr. Keith."

" Yes ? "

She looked very straightly into his eyes. " You give me your word that this was—all of it ? "

He was puzzled a moment. " All of—oh, I see." The colour rose in his face. " Well, we couldn't—again. I mean—even supposing there had been the chance. But—— "

The Reverend Mother interrupted him. " Yet this was *before* Father Cameron had pleurisy. That was in Lent, I know. He was ill some time." The sternness had come back into her face.

He still looked perplexed, but met her eyes frankly enough. Then he understood. He sighed, but without resenting her misdoubt. " What I told you was true. Only I hadn't finished. We hardly so much as spoke to each other, for weeks. I mean if we were alone, which wasn't often. We had to talk at meals and so on, of course. Then she told me she had arranged to go away. I'd—there'd been—something else just then, as well, and that was a little more than—It wasn't her fault. You can be sure of that. She wasn't to blame. But I was cad enough to play on her pity—yes, I came down to that. I must have been mad. She'd never have allowed—oh, what does it matter ? That's—well, we ran into my wife, just afterwards. Someone had been to her, gossiping about Anne. God—or the devil

—knows how that tale got about. The woman could have known nothing, I'll swear to that. . . . That was when Bertha was killed—but you know about that. My lawyer's wife took her to stay with them. I only saw her once after Bertha's funeral. I asked her to marry me, and she refused. I thought she would change her mind, so I waited a while. Then she wrote to me, to say she was coming here."

He ended, and leant back wearily in his chair. The light from the upper, unfrosted panes of glass was nearly gone. The gaslight made him more haggard.

Mother Felicitas was silent a while. Then she crossed herself, bowed her head, and her lips moved. She looked up again, with no anger in her face. "God help you both. And I promise you I'll pray hard that He will. If you were less worth help, the two of you, you'd need it less."

He said "Thank you. It was good of you to listen. It isn't the kind of story one tells a woman."

"Never mind that. I want to help Anne Ogilvie. And I'm willing enough to help you, Mr. Keith. But I wish I knew more clearly how to do it."

He laughed grimly. "Yes. It isn't very easy. Father Cameron said she'd refused to marry me because she knew I'd have to sell Kinnellan. Well, of course I'll do that. But you see—she'll know I have done it."

"Yes, I understand."

"And besides—I hardly think that was all of it. There was my wife. And I've let her in for this. If it hadn't been for me, she'd have married Hailes. He'd have made her happy, I think."

"Would you leave her alone?"

"No. That's impossible, too. It did seem best. She'd chosen that. I'd no right to interfere. She

might have had peace that way, at any rate. But even that's impossible for her now. To marry me —well, at least I can look after her."

"Yes. It seems better. There's the child to think of."

"I suppose so. Well, can I ask her then? . . . My God, I suppose I'll have to tell her—about this."

"I'll do that. No, it had better be you, I think. But it's too late to-night. Will you come in the morning? Tierce and our mass are over by half-past eight, and the boarders have breakfast then. Will you come at nine?"

The hour seemed grotesque for such an interview, but he grasped at it, and even would have come earlier if he could. He had seldom been afraid of anything, and his instinctive reaction when he was would always be to charge headlong at what he feared.

"Wait—I should take Class Six's Latin to-morrow. . . . No, I can change with Sister Catherine, I think. I'll get her to give them their History then instead. I won't be there, unless you think it better. But she may need me later, possibly."

He took up his hat and stick. "Thank you," he said, and meant it, though there was nothing more he could add.

Her beads slipped down with a rattle against the floor, as she rose, crossed the room, and rang for the Sister Portress.

CHAPTER II

"And ever the mair I am in dout
The mair that I remeid have socht."
A Meditatioun in Wyntir.

THE bleak wind of Keith's thoughts drove him aimlessly to the north. He found himself in a while on the Bruntsfield Links, and looking up across the green space of the Meadows, saw the steep cliffs, like a wall, under Arthur's Seat, confronting the crimson and amber of after sunset. They stood up from the crowding hum of the city, as his own at Kinnellan rose over the North Sea. The sea would be better than waiting walled in a house: he halted to find his bearings for the Firth, but only knew it was somewhere beyond the hill, and dimly remembering the weary stretch of Leith Walk, went on, heading vaguely towards the coloured cliffs, half-conscious that they were the friendliest things in sight. He was tired, like a man who has lost a deal of blood, but it was less of an effort to go forward than to break off walking to rest on one of the seats, and having turned to the cliffs he wandered on till he found himself within half a mile of them, in a city street again. That woke him a little, and he sought his way to the hill more consciously. He would see the Firth if he got high enough, so made his way through queer intervals of daze, by a vague road that he could not have recovered, till he found himself at last in a bare high stillness, somewhere under the northmost lift of the Lion's Head.

The city was lavender smoke, starry with lights, and beyond the gleam of the Firth the long Fife shore. A

broken moon rose out of the sea in a while, and lighted thin cloud that advanced in a slow wind. The hill fell away from him darkly to the north, where a light like the imminent rise of a second moon was gathered in a pool on the horizon, behind a dim wave of hills. He sat staring towards it, inarticulately homesick like a beast for the familiar and beloved life before his act had brought these things to pass.

The wind had gone landward with the fall of dusk, and brought him a scent of fresh water : the year had been rainy. The chilly fragrance touched on his cheek like silk . . . or Anne's hair on the night that had wrecked the Dutch ship and themselves. He remembered the wreck, the spectral glint of her signal-flares on the surf, the whelming suck of the water at his body, but very little of what had come thereafter, only Anne and high wind and a dark strong peace like the sea : the bleakness of the next morning walled them from him, as if the ruin of their happiness had tumbled in hard grey masses across his memory. The storm in them both had been less a gust of the senses than a sudden flame from the core of personality that transcending the body had forgotten it, left it to follow blindly its own impulse, as echo and instrument of what informed it. He had few sense-memories of that possession, and his mind refused to admit to consciousness such fragments of them as it had retained. Only the cold soft sting of her hair at his mouth found him at times with an anguish he drove under, lest there should rise from it a worse pain still, and he should see Anne asleep on his arm again, a strand of dark hair trailing between her breasts.

He put by a threatened resurgence of the memory, tried to think of her as he had seen her last. A ghost of her rose obediently enough, with frozen dark eyes,

but he could reach no further. She was deaf to his desperate question of " What's to do ? " and would not look at him. He stared out north, and slowly the broken moon advanced behind him. He was trying to think, but his mind moved heavily, like a man making his way through breast-high water. They must marry : so much was fixed, at any rate. And then ? The dark silent eyes still looked on past him.

Through the blind tides of his mind clove a thin clear stream. He would have to go from Kinnellan, at all events. He was too numb to feel it sharply as pain, only a cold forlornness that had no comfort. That Anne should be Anne was transfiguration of life : regret to have loved her did not occur to him. But Kinnellan, since he remembered, was life itself. He had been born to heir it : it was his work : he had caught it from his father's broken grasp, surrendering to it his hopes of young adventure, and finding them, then, fulfilled in the fight to save it against a bank smash and a run of disastrous harvests. He had won the fight triumphantly, mended its fortunes : the privateer grandfather who had bought it back from the Jacobite loss of a century before had done no more for it than his nine years' labour. That by country custom he should bear its name, be called " Kinnellan," spoke the simple truth. The place and he had long since become a unit, with a dour deep-rooted identity to bind them. To cut them apart was a sort of mutilation.

He did not dwell consciously upon the loss. He had accepted its necessity : the twenty-nine years of his life were cut adrift, gone overboard like a ship's mast jettisoned. He must hold his course without them, in a new-born world where the past had no relevance, and must have none if he was to hew a life there for himself

and those for whom he was to answer. He fronted the future like a man who has only newly lost an arm, and must needs try to grasp with a hand no longer there.

His mind, still dazed by the shock of the afternoon, slid helplessly back when he tried to surmount the problem. In the past, when the crash of Bertha's death was newer, he had worked it out, deciding that for her own sake it would not be possible to bring Anne to Kinnellan, and since he must marry her, that he must leave it. He had decided for South America: Canada, his first thought, was a larger Scotland, too closely bound to the older kingdom for Anne. His own vague preference was for Natal, or the Boer republics northward from Cape Colony, but he knew very little about them, and that little suggested the life would be hard for a white woman. Peru he knew reasonably well by hearsay, from his father's stories of an adventurous youth. The Spanish the older man had taught him was rusty, but he could still make shift to read Cervantes. . . .

His mind groped dully over the recollection, and lapsed again. That had been thought out once. He could recover it when it came to be needed. Meanwhile, one did not have to think of that. There was Anne to see in the morning. . . . Anne in the morning. . . .

He would have to break to her what must happen now. It did not occur to him to doubt at all if she still loved him, but that made the thing no better. He understood the bases of her choice that they should work out their lives, for the future, apart. Bertha was dead, through their treachery to her. That they deliberately should make that their profit . . . he comprehended Anne's point of view too well to combat it honestly even to repair the wrong he had done her

by the sole means left him. He had forfeited any right in her, even to guard, and so had chosen his road, to fight it out, go on with his work in a country where like enough he passed for a murderer. It struck him then that they would have now clear certainty of his guilt. He was safe, in all likelihood, from the Court of Justiciary, since if the only witness was his wife they could not bring her to give evidence. But any motive lacking would be plain.

Well: that did not matter now. He must tell Anne that the way she had chosen was closed. They must pay together. He remembered then that they could still live apart: he could establish her in Edinburgh, in France if she liked, see that she lacked for nothing. . . . But that would not do. He could not hold his own road if hers were broken. His conscious mind, groping about for a reason, felt that she needed his presence for protection, but deeper than that was a sense, dumb and profound, that the thing that had brought them together was somehow fated, a sentence pronounced as inevitable doom, that the most they could do was to face it without shifts, confronting its terms as they were meted out.

What the further future might be was beyond any forecast. The issues had been evident twelve hours back, the terms of the struggle thenceforth clear and defined. Now it was like the cliffs in a North Sea fog. Nothing was real but unreality, and a shrouding sense of unformulable danger. Only two things were clear, leaving Kinnellan, and Anne to see in the morning, at nine to-morrow.

That spurred his flagging consciousness again to attempt clear thought, but he was very tired. His mind laboriously groped for words, to put the thing as gently as he could, ease as he might Anne's shrinking

from himself. Would it not have been the best thing after all to let Mother Felicitas—— ? No, that would not do. He could not shirk to that. But—little Anne. . . . He must tell her of this in the morning . . . in the morning. . . .

The shock of the priest's news earlier in the day, the violence he had done to his habit of mind in telling his story to the Superior, its immediate reliving as he told it, on top of six months of hard emotional strain, bad sleep, his own self-despisal, and of late his neighbours' suspicion, had worn him past clear thought. An unfamiliar sense of physical weakness, of unreadiness to decide, made him strange to himself. He had always been used to clear sight and immediate action, and this numbness that lay cold on his mind and body gave him the sense of futile irritation that a man three-parts asleep in unwonted discomfort may feel for some ugly noise that he cannot control.

But just now at least there was no immediate call for action or even for a present disguise. Not even himself for witness : he was too tired. Fatigue hung on him like a sodden garment. He sagged on his stone, his head on the bank behind him, and drifted to a chilled sleep of exhaustion, from which he woke suddenly, feeling cramped and stiff. The light had changed and broadened : it faced the moon, from the thin haze that came up over the sea. The crowded ridge of the town raked to the Castle, in a gaunt clearness that spread without colour or shadow, like something before God had created the world. Distant and small, a cock crew under the hill. It was morning, then. And he must see Anne at nine.

CHAPTER III

" Seying pleynly, Fortune doth wry
Al contrary From myn entent."
Earl Rivers his Compleynt.

At seven or so he came to an hotel, looking wild enough with a night's beard dark on his chin, his clothes crushed and stained with earth, and muddy shoes, and leaden half-circles underneath his eyes. They were used to travellers arriving at crazy hours, thought him a laird or factor from the north, come in for law-business by an early train, after a four o'clock start in a *machine*, and his order of bath and breakfast roused no comment. The hot water soaked the deadness out of his body : he finished matters with an icy douche that seemed to clear his head to some extent. Shaved, brushed, and dressed, he felt himself not so helpless : his soldiering blood made him neat instinctively.

Breakfast, however, was another matter. He pushed his porridge away from him, half-choked, tore a bap in two with an impatient gesture, and was promptly faced with a plate of ham and eggs. It scunnered him, but the hot scent of it set his nerves craving hungrily for food. He had fasted now since noon of the day before. He tackled it with reluctance, but cleared the plate, and the hot strong tea with which it was washed down steadied him further. It was no more than eight : he lit a pipe, and sat down behind the *Scotsman* in the lounge. He read the leader, on a speech of Gladstone's : it was effectively vituperative, and normally he would have relished it, for he took his politics with some

seriousness. Having finished it, he looked once more at his watch, and began once more the leading article, without any remembrance that he had seen it already. There was a florid clock on the wall beside him, and through the external traffic of hoofs on granite he could hear the fussy catch and halt of its ticking. He looked up at it : he would go at the half-hour. And he read the leading article again. The page on duty murmured to the clerk, " He's a dour chiel yon ! He min's me o' a burnt-oot stable lanthorn." The clerk, a genteel youth, said sharply, " Sh ! " and the hiss of it made him look at the clock again. It was a quarter-past. He put down the *Scotsman*, took his hat and stick and went out through the swing door. It was raining uncertainly, out of a colourless sky.

He crossed George IV. Bridge, and a teasing wind clawed at his hat. In the act of clapping it on his head more firmly he was struck for the first time with the surprising knowledge of his fatherhood. It was so sudden a shock that it halted him : he found himself staring at the man in front, who looked back puzzled, with blue friendly eyes, that evidently sought for a remembrance. He mumbled an apology, and went on, still astonished. The thing had been so much Anne's concern, his only, if deeply, as it affected her. But a son—it was that, of course, as he thought of it. . . . He had wanted that for some years : it was part of his duty to see Kinnellan adequately heired, and without impatience he had looked forward to it. He liked children, got on well with those in the village, being less shy with them than he was with their elders. This . . . he strode on in a tangle of odd emotions till he found himself turning into Whitehouse Loan, and realised once more what he had to do.

He looked at his watch. It lacked ten minutes yet. He went on as far as the convent, and then past it, between sober garden walls under tall trees. The long pleasant street led nowhere in particular : a brisk milk cart, a postman coming from his round, a belated schoolboy or two, in no great hurry, made up its morning traffic, apart from himself.

Nine rang through the rain, gustily, from the Ridge, when his hand grasped the bell and he heard its jangle again. The Sister Portress did not keep him waiting.

Outside the parlour door he met Mother Felicitas. The grave fine face regarded him with pity, for the marks of his vigil were apparent yet, but before the other nun she said only " Good morning," holding out her hand to him in the Highland fashion, and then, " If you will wait a moment, Mr. Keith—— " She motioned him into the parlour, and went away. He could just hear the receding swish of their habits, the soft double pad of feet. The sound died out, and another, of children's voices, rose in chorus. A junior class, not very far away, were singing " Bonny Dundee " with a good deal of spirit. The tune broke off as someone made a mistake, and began again at the third line. They went through it once more : the swinging tune bore heavily on his mind, and made it impossible to collect his thoughts. He cursed it impatiently under his breath, put down his hat and stick on the yellow table, and looked at the closed door. The room was cheerless. The glazed countenance of the Raphael Madonna simpered serenely from its shabby frame.

He sat down on an angular chair, and then stood up again. Oh, damn that infernal tune ! . . . it went on and on, to the defiant threat,

" Ye hae not heard the last o' my Bonnets and me,"

delivered with tremendous treble gusto . . . and then he could hear steps in the passage again, a double sound of them, one of heeled shoes that clicked in a rhythm he knew.

The blood stood still in his body. The door swung inward, and Anne Ogilvie came in and closed it behind her, and stood so incredibly like his recollection that for a moment he hardly knew that he saw her. It was impossible that she existed, was in front of him now with her black gown and dark hair, could see him, hear his voice if he spoke to her. Then her reality flooded over him. This was Anne. . . . He grew to acceptance, and stood gazing. They faced each other over the yellow table, each breathing quietly the fact of the other's being.

There was a change, as if a light had gone out, and time moved on again through the rainy daylight. It was the convent parlour and Thursday morning: they groped for the words they had been meaning to say, but those were lost on the far side of their meeting. Anne seemed to enclose herself from him again, become the slim self-contained presence he had seen moving about Kinnellan in friendly silence, or quietly gay, responding to his orders as he taught her to handle a foil in the gallery. The black gown with its tight bodice and purfled skirt, the smooth crown of hair, the delicate pointed face, were like the very soul of that lost life: he could not shatter their recall of it, for a moment, with the invasion of his news, and waited for her to speak, but she was silent. Her eyes rested on him, and they were still content.

He got out at last, "I've come, Anne. . . ." and stuck for more.

A smile made her face like a grave child's again. She said, " Yes, I know. It is my birthday to-morrow." He remembered then she was nearly twenty-one. Yesterday, when Father Cameron had brought his news, he had been in the act of going through her papers. But the sound of her voice had halted him again : in the lifetime of weeks since he had heard it last it had not changed at all, and that disconcerted him.

Yet he had to go through with it now, although for the first time in all his life he would have been willing not to do a thing simply because he was afraid of it. He said, " It's not that. Your papers were ready to send. You said you would rather I did not see you again."

She thought he was hurt over that, and made a quick half-movement, and then checked it. " You know I meant—— " Her intention eluded words.

He shook his head. " That's all right. I know what you meant. That was why I never came. I knew you were right, Anne. But it won't do. We'll have to —we'll have to marry after all."

Her eyes changed at that, and grew weary suddenly, as if a defence she relied on had proved unstable. " You know we can't." He had halted at sight of her eyes. She went on, " My dear, we've been over this already. You had to offer it then, but even then you knew as well as I did it wouldn't do. You wouldn't have let me go if you hadn't known it. And I wouldn't have gone. But it simply—you know we can't."

" Why not ? Do you mind a murderer so much ? "

" Gilbert ! " Her hands flung out to him at the cry. " You know that I—— "

He did not move to take them. " You think I meant to ? "

" You know I do not. Remember, I was there."

" So was I—you forget that, I think ! " His tight grin was ugly. " Well, we'll pass that. But a repute for murder—— "

She made a fierce, half-inarticulate sound, and he met the blaze of her eyes. The sentence trailed out.

" No, that's not it, I know. Forgive me, Anne. I've been living with that—it plays tricks with a man's temper." He seemed to be managing as badly as possible, and beat helplessly about for some way of telling her, short of hurling the facts at her at point-blank range. There was a vague idea in his mind that if he could make her consider the marriage first it would be easier to tell her after. But although she could not formulate her conviction he felt it profoundly enough to lack means for combat.

His bewildered helplessness was making him angry. If she had been either less brave or less fragile, he could have launched his rage at her resolution, battered at it : but he had to choke it down, and it turned on himself and lashed. He gripped a chair-back.

" Anne, it's got to happen. We've got to make the best of it."

She answered him without words or even a gesture : he felt his will put aside like a parried blade.

" We'll leave Scotland, my dear, and—— "

" No ! " she cried at that.

He remembered then what the priest had said to him. " Do you think I'm choosing between you and Kinnellan ? Or if I were, which do you think I would choose ? "

He did not expect her answer. " It would be me. You wouldn't do anything else."

" You do see that ? "

"You'd sacrifice me to Kinnellan, I believe. And you'd be right. . . ."

"But Anne——"

She went on calmly. "You wouldn't sacrifice me simply *for* it—to keep it, I mean. Even though it matters most. But how should I feel if you'd let it go for me?"

He was in a furious hurry to disclaim, but she smiled, putting him by. "That's not to question your loyalty, my dear."

That stung him, and bitterly. "You've every cause to." But before she could break out in answer, he cut the argument. "This has nothing to do with it, Anne. You believe I love you?"

"Yes."

"Very well. When you chose as you did last spring I could have made you marry me if I'd tried. And by all the ordinary decent standards, I ought to have tried. I gave up without a struggle, because I knew what you meant, and you were right. I can see why you came here, why you're going to France. I'm no Catholic. I don't know much about—this sort of thing." (He made a gesture at the room about him.) "But I did know what you meant. So I let you go. What I'd —thought of—might have been right for other people, but for us—well, you'd got it. Oh, I did know that. Do you think I'd have let you go if I hadn't known it? Only now . . . my God, how am I going to tell you? It's no good now."

The defence had gone out of her face. He could see nothing in it but the eyes, that clung to his. But the thing that was clearest there was an urgent concern for himself, and that nearly broke him. He flung himself on a chair, and turned away from her.

There was a timeless interval of cold pain, and he heard her dress move over the smooth oilcloth. She had come nearer him. " Gilbert, what has happened ? There's something I don't know. What is it, please ? "

The words came as a man might curse at a turn of the rack. " Mother Felicitas—— " He could get no further.

Anne seemed to go even more still. " You mean that she—— "

" She sent for me," he said.

" Do you mean—do you mean—— ? "

He saw what she thought, and it brought him to his feet. " No, it's not that—She hasn't. She . . . she's all right, Anne. Only, you see . . . she knew that you were going to be a nun. And it's impossible now. So she tried to help you. She wrote to Father Cameron."

" And he went to you ? " She had stood back from him.

" Anne ! "

" No, I am grateful. I should be grateful, I know. It would be to help me that you discussed it all."

" Anne ! " he cried then, on a note that made her halt : she had turned away from him, towards the door. " I'm—everything I say seems to be wrong. But let me finish. We didn't ' discuss ' you, dear. He had to tell me. I'd a right to know. She couldn't—she didn't know who it was, you see. That's the only reason she told Father Cameron. I had to know. You see—it's my child as well." He caught at the last sentence, but it was out.

Anne's movement broke suddenly, like a shot bird's : she went so still that she seemed to have ceased breathing. He began to wonder if the blow had killed her.

She would fall if he let her stand so : but he could not touch her. Not till she spoke.

She went on standing there, her hand still lifted a little for the door. If she would speak, cry out, even faint or weep. . . . The stretched hand dropped to her side after a time.

" That is why, then ? " She might have been asking, " Is it raining ? "

" Yes," he said, miserably. " Well—you see."

" Yes. It makes things—— " She seemed to forget him then, staring in front of her. He groaned silently. If only—— He began to fumble for words, to give her a comfort that he could not feel. They did not come : he had time to look into the future, feel the bleak sordid business foul on his palate. Anne, of all women, living in furtive hiding, a belated wedding-ring. . . . He counted months. Suppose those other women—— ? But she had moved.

She was looking at him again. He moved to meet her. She put her hands to his breast and stooped her face there, and he held her carefully, agonised with pity, not daring to draw her close. But she had sought shelter. That pulled him together. He must act for her.

He drew her against him then, and spoke firmly and quietly. " You're not to worry, bairn. You'll stay here for the present. You're perfectly safe with Mother Felicitas. And I'll look after you."

She looked up, and smiled. There was no fear in her eyes, but a quiet wonder. They were steady and acceptant under his own. He turned dizzy suddenly, and caught his breath, then stooping kissed her forehead very gently. A rush of new strength flamed in him. Anne was to guard. And this—" By God," he

said, " if my son's like you—— " He laughed. " I've done well by the place, at all events." It was then he remembered what they had said of Kinnellan.

Anne also : he felt her go cold like a douched fire. Neither moved a moment : they were balancing in a sudden chilly dusk, and a coil of thought flashed through it, very briefly. He looked back at Anne. She knew all that he had seen. Perhaps more besides.

She moved quietly out of his arm, and he allowed her, staying where he was. She said calmly then, " You wish me to stay on here ? "

He answered stupidly, " I suppose it's better," then tried to drag himself into rational thought. " I'll arrange about—the marriage, as soon as I can. We can't be cried." He realised that he had made her wince, and coloured himself, then went on awkwardly, " It won't take long. I suppose you'd prefer a priest ? "

" A priest ? Oh, you mean—is there civil marriage here ? "

" The Sheriff. Some other ways too. But you'd prefer one ? "

" Thank you. I should prefer it if you don't mind." They might have been discussing the loan of a horse.

" I'll take you somewhere then where you can be quiet. You'd rather be in the country, wouldn't you ? "

" I should like it better, I think. But it does not matter."

" I can arrange it easily enough. Then I can settle about "—he steadied his voice—" Kinnellan and so forth. There's no hurry for that. You'll hardly be fit to travel before February."

" No, I suppose not. Does it take so long ? "

He went on, desperately matter-of-fact. (If she fell, could he catch her before she struck the table ?) " I'll have to talk to Mother Felicitas. There may be some bother, as I'm Protestant."

" Yes, there is something. One has to sign a paper. We may have to have some sort of dispensation."

" Well, we can find out—— " He sprang to catch Anne as she staggered, but she broke from him and fumbled at the door. He let her drag it open and go out, and waited till Mother Felicitas came for him.

She was angry at first : he took the thing so calmly. Then he moved : his back was no longer to the light. She realised there was nothing she could do for him, and got him away as quickly as she could.

CHAPTER IV

"So that thou liv'st twice, twice art buried."
The Honest Whore.

THE slanting rail of the stair climbed endlessly, past noises, an alternation of light and shadow. Anne got to her door at last, closed it behind her, and found herself facing the room with a kind of shock, like one roused suddenly from a strong dream, and finding his daylight curtains unbelievable. For many weeks she had turned her face from Kinnellan, in all her waking and acknowledged life: if it stirred in sleep she would not admit it further. Gilbert was under her mind continually, since he was part of the substance of her being: but that their exterior life should not touch again was as certain now as if she had been dead.

But now the dream had enforced itself on her waking, and made the room about her phantasy. But the rail of her bed was cold. . . . Yet the dream was real. She had seen Gilbert again, been where he was. She knew that breathlessly, in astonished appeasement. The line of his cheek ran *so* from the ear to the chin: it was thus his head turned as he spoke to her. Gilbert. She closed her eyes to keep that safe, and held herself still to ward off other thought.

But it was Gilbert unhappy. That roused her soon. Her urgent will to comfort him broke the stillness. She had to think, face his immediate need, and confronting this new drive of their circumstance, felt her foothold go wild like a man at a flooded ford.

She shook her head, as if hair had blown into her

eyes, and looked from one to another of the objects that had been about her waking for more than two months now. Polished linoleum and a green felt mat: the bright brass knobs at the foot of her narrow bedstead, the curtain of striped blue print over her gowns, the painted wooden drawers with china handles. Miss Ogilvie's room. Number Two. Next to Miss Jardine's. It belonged to a girl who was going to the Carmel at Léry.

The plane of her daily existence grew more solid: she recovered her hold on the early hours of the morning, began to relate them with what had come after. The first of the linen veils she would wear as novice lay folded, half-hemmed, on the edge of her work-basket: the weight of the heavy stuff came back to her fingers. She had felt, sewing it, that the terms of her life were in all but a brief slight dream now those of the Carmel —"the service of God, the companionship of my sisters, the rule of the Order," that she would claim beginning her novitiate. The path was a steep one enough, but clearly marked: the continual emptying of self in toil, not for the self, in the steady labour of prayer, the abandonment of any mortal desire.

Now a solid road of ten weeks had doubled and vanished. The time was real—it is a long time, at twenty: but all that filled it had been emptied out. This was now both April and the end of June: yet neither. Trying vainly to compass the gap, she saw Kinnellan as if through a glass, small, bright, and very clear, close on the eyeball, but infinitely out of reach of touch. There were the slanting bushes in the garden, the wet brown weed at low tide under the cliffs, the play of the changing sea-lights on wall and ceiling. A sudden wild desire for the place came on her, to hear

the incessant tides under the rock, watch the long-winged gulls soar on the slope of the wind, crying about the Tower, and the broad land inshore, and Gilbert riding through the arch of the gate, his keen dark glance going up to the bright flag. She moved a little towards the recollection, protectively. He must be thought for now. She broke through the vague shift of her bewilderment, took her stand on that. So much was firm, at least.

She crossed herself, seeking the terms of a prayer for him. The words that came into her mind were from the Angelus.

" . . . . *R.* Be it unto me according to Thy word.
V. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

Repeating its " Hail Mary " under her breath, she thought again of their significance. Our Lady had accepted, without fear, not thinking of herself, and God's will for man was wrought accordingly, in man's redemption. If one accepted, worked on the terms that were given, without flinching or shifts, surely His will for Gilbert. . . . If God existed. She had no sense of Him.

Gilbert's immediate presence had roused her again to a power of emotion that had been in abeyance : but the stress of that, and the shock of what she had learnt, had left her too exhausted, for the moment, for more than the attempt of a tired will to act on cold intellectual conviction. It was difficult to make herself grasp the thing. For so long a time she had been unused to feeling, still deadened by all that had come to her in the spring, the grey suffering of the weeks after the wreck, the fight to deal, as best she could for them both, with the situation in which they had found

themselves, then the crowding horrors that had come at Easter, the knowledge of the full scope of their wrong to Bertha, the sudden storm of pity and then of passion that had dragged her into permitting a fresh surrender . . . and within an hour of them both she had had to witness both Bertha's denunciation and her death, been plunged in an agony of fear for Gilbert. For days his trial for murder had seemed inevitable : and when that ceased to be an immediate nightmare, she had realised that they could not now come together without not merely the loss to him of Kinnellan but a lowering of themselves, and perhaps each other, in their own esteem, that was worse than separation. She could not choose that, nor let him choose it for them : but the fight to decide so, against their immediate craving, had exhausted finally the last of her strength, and reaching then the peaceful blank of the convent she had lapsed to numbness, acting, when she had need, on the mere memory of her resolution.

Yet she had still a strength of vitality that in the quiet passing of the last weeks had been making steadily for recovery, in spite of the physical stresses of her condition. But the ground she had regained was still insecure : the sudden shock of the morning had driven her back, and left her in no state as yet to cope with the fundamental change in her circumstances. Now that she was alone, and Gilbert's presence was passing from her, she began to lapse to a mere weariness of any effort. Yet she must think, decide. . . . She summoned to her what she had known and believed when she was less stunned. She had never heard of Plato's description of courage, but its principle had been trained into her mind.

One thing seemed clear, at least. They were forced

together, no longer by any choice of their own will. She could go back to him, at any rate, and felt some dim appeasement at the knowledge that she would necessarily see him again: yet found herself still shrinking from the contact for reasons that lay in nerves rather than mind, and so beyond her grasp, for her mind admitted that since the reunion was not of their own choice, it cancelled what most had made that choice impossible.

She groped at the thing. That was clear, at all events. Whatever she must do that was best for Gilbert, the terms of it now must lie within their marriage, or he could have no forgiveness for himself. One had to accept the terms, then, act upon them. She passed the back of her hand over her face. If only her mind would work: but her thoughts were leaden. It was difficult to feel this concerned themselves. Still, there was nothing she could do about that, except to wait until he should arrange it. And then go away. She had an access of panic, but drove it under, tried to think out preparations for a journey. The grey dress she had laid aside at her uncle's death was presentable still: her few others were very shabby. All but . . . she winced, remembering the white silk she had meant to alter to wear on the day of her Clothing, for the wedding gown of the rite. She had worn it once, at a hospital ball at Stonehaven, and danced with Gilbert. But that did not count. The wedding that lay before her. . . . She set her teeth, and began to consider her linen: she had replenished nothing for a year, save by her novice's heavy yellow cotton. A moment's thankfulness flashed in her mind: she would not have to wear the ugly things. And shoes. . . . She began to wonder where he would take her.

That made the new world real, of a sudden. Her mind caught and staggered, beginning to comprehend the unbelievable thing that had happened to her. She faced the blind limits of her ignorance. When, in what manner, Gilbert's child would be born, were problems for which she could come on no solution. She fumbled at them with her scraps of knowledge : she had seldom touched a baby in her life, never a very young one. People were ill. It was to other people that these things happened.

She tried to envisage it, her hands clasped tightly, and strange emotions tangling at her stiff thoughts. Old Madame Michon had once told her aunt that the Goriots' baby was just like its father. . . . She gripped her hands, and said " Gilbert " under her breath. This one was part of him, within herself. She had known that already, for a time. He too : his eyes, suddenly quiet and sure, exultant in her. . . . And they had lost Kinnellan. He would not have Kinnellan any more. And because of her. She saw the parlour again. That was real : it had happened : it was not a dream. It had happened, or was going to happen, all of it. And Gilbert would have to leave Kinnellan now. If it had been impossible before to take her there as his wife . . . She remembered that Marie Audoux had had a baby. And Madame Michon . . . she could understand now. If Gilbert should hear them speak of herself like that. . . . He would take her away, but that meant leaving Kinnellan.

She was aware the blame was not all her own, but while she admitted that, she knew she was cause. He had planned out a life, and settled to face it . . . she went back like a ghost to the night that had wrecked them both, felt the rough hard graze of his cheek

against her breast. The sudden memory of that transflammation fired to a fierce pain, that she beat fiercely under. If she had not been ignorantly obedient, had thought in time, he need not have borne this. Kinnellan. Bertha. He had that to remember. And she had let him ruin herself as well: he must bear that. Kinnellan might mean more, but its loss was honest, faced as a penalty that had been earned. The power of emotion was rousing in her again: the blow had stunned it awhile, but that was passing. She was rousing to be aware of more than merely having seen Gilbert again, having to change her intention. The change began to take its place in a background, of past and future. She looked back at Kinnellan, and could see Bertha in the drawing-room, discussing the colours for the hyacinths.

She flagged before the scourging memories, but forced herself again to put them by. It was the future that concerned her now. She had to be ready to go away with Gilbert. There were clothes and packing: she must think about them. And after that . . . she brought up again on her ignorance, and fumbling over the little that she knew remembered that Bertha had once said to her. . . .

Her body drew together: her hands rose stiffly, and pressed at the sides of her head. She remembered Bertha, on what had been almost the last day of her life, awkward and flushed, but exultantly delighted. "It'll be real nice to have a baby. I've always thought I would like one of my own. And maybe Gilbert will cheer up a bit when I tell him. He's been out of sorts lately—don't you think so, Anne? I wish I could make him take some of that malt extract, but he's as dour . . ." She could hear the familiar giggle. Bertha

. . . she had been dead within two days, and the child that should have been hers. Anne hunched together. Kind simple Bertha, whom she had repaid by stealing her life and the bearing of Gilbert's child. . . . There was worse than that. She remembered his face on the cliffs, could hear his quiet voice through the sound of the sea : " So Bertha has been telling you—her news ? " . . . the dreadful white glint of a smile in the haggard face : " It wouldn't surprise me much if it had your eyes." Bertha had died an hour later, and between . . . Her stiff hands crisped, drawing across her mouth. She could have checked him, if she had thought of it. And had not. She remembered Bertha's trust and kindness. She had borne them both through the weeks since March began : Bertha had praised their courage at the wreck. But this now. . . . The sheer strength of the pain was blinding, but the loss of physical vision, for some moments, focussed the thing more clearly in her mind, like the ray of a burning-glass on her naked spirit. And Gilbert had been burdened, because of herself, with no less guilt, and a greater penalty. If she had thought of withholding at the first. . . . She crouched, her face on the backs of her helpless hands, rocking her body slowly from side to side. The sickness of recent mornings returned on her, bringing her suddenly retching to her knees, fumbling blindly for the iron pail below her washstand.

The nausea passed, leaving her cold and dizzy. She wiped the streaming water from her eyes, the chilly sweat that had started on her forehead, and groped to the bed. A clock was striking outside, and the school-bell rang for the morning interval. She ought to be in the embroidery-room. But the scales of Saint Michael's dragon would have to wait, till her hands were steady

enough to lay gold thread. She let her mind lapse in a sodden vacancy, then heard a knock at the door. It was Mother Felicitas.

She came forward: her eyes were pitiful and indignant, for Anne's face was like linen, and her dress half-open. The girl tried to rise, with an attempt at smiling, but she motioned her back.

"Just lie where you are, my dear. I'd have been sooner, but I thought—aye well, I thought you'd be better without me for a while. You'll know I know what it was Mr. Keith had to tell you." She sat down on the bed, pushed her sleeve out of the way, and felt Anne's forehead. "Lassie, you're just like ice! Have you not got a shawl?" She began to hunt about the room for a wrap.

"I ought to be in the embroidery-room."

Mother Felicitas had found a cloak. She happed it round Anne, tucking in the edges, took off her shoes. "You're better where you are. I'll tell Sister Agatha that you're not well." Her reflections on men, internally, were unkind, but she did not express them. Anne had closed her eyes. She rang the bell. "What you want's a good cup of hot tea."

The little maid who looked after "the ladies" came in and went away to the kitchen for it, with a sympathetic glance at Miss Ogilvie, who smiled faintly back. The Superior came to the bed, and kneeling beside it slipped an arm under Anne's head, saying nothing at all. The girl lay still for a while, then hid her face against the rough serge habit, with a small broken sound, between groan and sigh.

Jeannie came to the door with the tea after a while, and Mother Felicitas rose and took it from her, screening Anne from sight with the broad folds of her veil. She

came back. "Now, drink this, bairn, while it's nice and hot." She anticipated having to coax it down, but Anne sat up and took it from her obediently, pushing back her hair. The nun stood, her hands in her sleeves.

Anne put down the empty cup on the chair by her bed. "Reverend Mother," she said, "I'm afraid I'll want some shoes."

"There's a very good shop on the Bridges," said Mother Felicitas.

CHAPTER V

"Settle you
In what the deed hath made you."
The Changeling.

THERE was a point, a little outside Stonehaven, where Gilbert was used to look out from the train window. Kinnellan rose from the level of green fields, against the space of the sea, for a moment or two. That brief glimpse of it then meant he was home. The light of a spacious evening came from landward, gilding the tower against the dark blue beyond, and a faint lavender haze on the North Sea. A window caught the sun like a bright beacon.

Todd was at Muchalls to meet him, with the dog-cart. He put his master's bag under the seat, and the light cart lurched to one side on its springs as he swung his sturdy body into place: behind him a sunburnt porter touched his cap. The young black horse in the shafts was pretty fresh, and a couple of clattering milkcans close beside him gave Gilbert plenty to do for the first few minutes: the near wheel cleared the gate by about an inch.

They bowled briskly away from the little shrimp-pink station, struck out of the main road down the green glen, that led in a deep curve to the shore of the cliffs, where Kinnellan Tower stood on its severed berg. There was transparent shadow under their steepness, though the high fields and the sea had light on them yet, over the even breathing of a calm. When he halted the dog-cart a moment at the turn, the stir of

strong salt air ceased on his face, and the quiet sea on the shore was no more than a whisper.

He had driven home so scores of times in his life, come through the echoing tunnel of the gate, between the old loopholes in the sweating stone, and mounted the stairs from the stable to the house. His grey terrier met him on the green before it, and forgetting his customary mournful dignity wagged his thick little body in delighted relief that all was well again and his master returned.

Dinner was ready. Gilbert went up to wash, and with the towel hanging from his hands was startled to find his movements so accustomed. It was uncanny to go about the room without need to think where anything should be, and to go down to his own place at table and feel the chair familiar to his touch, know just how old Taggart's hand held the decanter, how the candlelight—for it was growing late now—stole through the duller air from the eastward windows.

He ate silently what the old man put before him. Taggart, serving him, was professionally effaced, but without any breach of his stately impassivity gave his master to understand he had something to say. Gilbert looked up at last from the plate in front of him.

"Yes?" he said.

Taggart came to a halt by the table. "May I ask, sir, if you have any word of Miss Anne?"

The kind wise old face was eager. His master swallowed another mouthful of claret: his throat had tightened. To lie to old Taggart he had known all his life, to sit at his table and lie to his own servant. . . . It had to be done: he settled to the job. He would need some resourceful lying for the next months, and

might as well begin . . . but it made it no easier that Taggart would never think of doubting him.

" I'm afraid she's not well, Taggart. She's far from well." To begin with truth, a face sincerely concerned, made the thing worse. He wished he had lied more firmly.

" I was doubting that, sir, when she went away. And when you took the south train in such a hurry, I was feared the minister body had brought ill news." His manner conveyed, respectfully, a reproach. To go suddenly to Edinburgh meant Miss Anne, and his master had ignored his claim to news of her.

Gilbert was perfectly aware of the protest, and ready enough to consider it justified. The patriarchal tradition of his father made the relationship of master and servant, when an enduring one, go fairly deep. Old Taggart had served his father long since in Lima, had known Anne's parents, the far bright-coloured life when the Scots filibuster Andy Ogilvie had courted exquisite Andrée de Méran. He had earned his answer.

" Father Cameron—that was the minister that called —he's the Catholic one from Stonehaven—had been down, and of course he called on her." It was best to stick as near as he could to truth : Taggart would know he had not had a letter. " He said she had not been looking well at all, and I thought the place might not be suiting her." He was well aware that if any rumours were going, his servants would certainly have heard of them.

" You're not taking your dinner, sir. Is the beef no enough ? "

" No, it's all right. What's that ? Gooseberries ? Out of the garden ? "

" Aye, sir. The yellow ones the old master liked." He filled Gilbert's glass again, and waited, pointedly.

Gilbert ate a large gooseberry. It was pleasantly cool, and the taste of it made him feel about ten years old. But he was twenty-nine, and a man grown, with a complicated course of lies ahead of him. He could tell Taggart a good deal of the truth, but he could not yet decide how much of it, or even what, precisely, was the truth.

" She's not ill, exactly, but I think she's needing a change. I'll have to see if we can't arrange it somehow." He went on with the gooseberries, and added then, " She asked for you." It was his first actual lie, but he felt it nearer truth than what he had said. If the circumstances had been—what they were not, Anne would certainly have asked for the old man. He dabbled his fingers in water, put down his napkin. " You can bring my coffee to the gallery."

" Can I tell the women, sir, that Miss Anne's no ill ? Yon Katie's a canary-headed limmer, but she's real fond of Miss Anne. She was asking me did I know anything."

He remembered Katie, confronting the police, like a combatant Amazon in a starched apron, with Anne's unconscious head on her broad shoulder. " Tell them by all means. I'll say to Miss Anne when I write they were asking after her."

" Thank you, sir. I'll do that. If you're writing her, I hope you'll kindly give her our respects."

" Certainly. She'll be pleased." He rose, awkwardly touched, and went up the familiar spiral of the stair, with its smooth stone roof that turned like the core of a shell. He had avoided the drawing-room on purpose, but he had to go through it now to reach the gallery,

or else go down again and along the wing. He would not do that, but his face hardened a little as the door moved in, familiar to his hand. It was beginning to be dusk a little. The light was thickening in the seaward windows, but the larger oriel out over the garden had the end of a wide green sunset, washed with rain to an unearthly clearness of pure pale light. The room, with no fire and no inhabitants, seemed to have died. Its worn, familiar grace, splashed here and there with Bertha's innovations, had been the common living-room of the house. He had been used in the past to see his wife there, her hands at bright crewel-work, her thick fair braids, and his father across the hearth, the wise high-bred old face and silver head relieved between the high back of the chair and the rug of dark Gordon tartan over his knees. Bertha's voice came, to the very verge of his hearing, high, clear, a little flat : and Anne singing from the dusk between the windows. He set his teeth with a sudden lift of the head, and strode to the other door, without looking behind him. The gallery that ran out in a later wing, to his father's old room that they called the King's Chamber, where he slept now, had a different light in it, and the windows were standing open to sea air. He knew the tide must be low : he could smell the weed.

Taggart brought coffee and cigars on a tray. " Will I light the lamps, sir—here or in the drawing-room ? "

The vesta his master was striking doubled up. " No. Let them be. I'll ring if I want a light."

" Very good, sir." Taggart took himself away, and Gilbert was left alone with his own house.

CHAPTER VI

"Nothing is
But what is not."
Macbeth.

THE falling tide of a calm lisped under the rock, and a large moon floated up from the further sea, and hung patiently, her light broadening on the water. A green star kindled on a south-going ship: it was still enough for the beat of her screw to reach him: he could see the foam of her wake in the growing moonlight. The gallery itself darkened from sight, all but the pale shape of familiar windows, the gleam of a rack of arms against the wall. Kinnellan—the place grew about him in the dusk, more substantially real in that no sight of it could bind him to an immediate and shifting present. The twenty-nine years of his life for which it stood strengthened to meanings before which the last three days were a thin and transient dream, empty of matter. His father sat lame in his room, by a driftwood fire . . . and, a splendid figure of a man, uncrippled, would go riding with a young lad that was himself, read stately Spanish aloud to him of an evening, or the long Alexandrines of Corneille, that beat under the screaming wind of the winter nights, and a small boy looked out at darkness through white-rimmed panes, at racing cloud by the small bright moon of December. The shock of the green clear water beyond the foam, as one dived from the outer rocks, the wind on his body, the good short grass of the slopes scattered white with daisies . . . he could smell them under his face in the

early summer, rolling to dry himself on a June morning, and fresh fish fried in oatmeal as one came in. A lad of nineteen, in a student's lodgings in Rosemount, with the telegram in his hand that ended his youth, and the hard fight of the years that came just after. 1880, that was. Things were very different now.

Now . . . that struck into his dream. Yes, they were different. The tower and the sea and the cliffs, the fields of his harvest, won by a steady campaign against earth and sky, the folk of the little village, his farm tenants, the broad countryside that went inland to the hills, whose outpost his own land was . . . they would need to be different. He remembered then, as one suddenly feels the truth of a thing long known, his Jacobite forbear, John Keith of the 'Fifteen. He also had had Kinnellan in his blood, two centuries and a half behind him unbroken, and had lost it and gone away from it into exile, in Germany and Spain. He had died in Paris, and his half-Spanish son been bred a Frenchman. It was his grandson, Gilbert's grandfather, who had bought the place back with the spoils of privateering, preferring, since he could not serve lawful kings, a German monarchy in his own country to a Corsican in what had once been France.

John Keith, twenty-five, riding west to the Braes of Mar. . . . He had lost Kinnellan honourably, at least: not for disloyalty to a guest and kinship and a guardian's honesty. Gilbert turned his mind from the portrait in Prussian uniform that he had hero-worshipped as a boy.

The suspension of time that had brought his whole life about him ceased at the impact of that. He was back in the present—a present now moving rapidly to a future. He had to grip on that and guide it true,

and the sooner he took the task in hand the better. He swallowed his cold coffee at a gulp, rang for Taggart, and ordered a lamp in the business-room.

There were three days' mail to go through, but nothing important. He sorted the immediate tasks in his mind. Anne's dispensation was in hand already: it had been something of a shock to him to find he must promise his children should be bred as Catholics. To leave Anne free from any interference was one thing: but the Keiths had been Presbyterians since the days when the redoubtable Earl George founded Marischal College with part of his Greyfriars loot. Yet he felt he had lost any right to a say in the matter, and swallowed the condition with a shrug. He was to go back in another week for the marriage, and meanwhile the two things that were most important were to find a place where Anne would be safe and in comfort, and to put in hand the matter of the sale. There was time enough for that, but he would need it. Kinnellan might not be easy to dispose of. Small, poor, with little sport attached to it, a cramped old house, very shabby in its appointments . . . a rich man would want a good deal more than that. His immediate neighbours could not afford more land. Some retiring merchant, bien but not too wealthy, might have a fancy to settle himself as a laird. . . . But if he was to abandon his ten years' work, it must be to someone who would continue it, would trouble to know the people and the place, do decently by both. His face hardened as he thought of the little village: only a few of the houses belonged to him, but he was the superior of the ground: a remitted feu-duty in a bad season meant a good deal to the poorer fishermen . . . but

he did not want them pauperising, either. Sandy Traill would cheat his grandmother's ghost of sixpence, and had a new excuse at every term. . . . He could see Sandy's large and solemn face, with an apostolic fringe of stiff grey beard and a lemon-grey eye that gazed with childlike frankness over his tallest story of ruined nets. Sandy had met his match with the young laird, and their consequent affection was mutual. On the night when the Dutch ship was wrecked on Catteraw, it was Sandy who had helped him get the rope out, in the face of a ten-to-one chance of ugly death . . . and next May Term had very nearly got round him on the little matter of his outside stair. He thought over his tenant farmers. Burn of Nessie had been sinking money lately in new machines : he would likely enough need time at Martinmas. And Mains was long in beginning to drain that park : the ground would be ruined soon if he left it as sour. . . .

His mind slid into the well-known paths of his work. He would not so have thought of it to himself, but as his forbears had led out their men in war against the English or their neighbours, so he captained his folk in their fight with earth, sky, and sea, loving all three as one loves an enemy. The four generations of Keiths who had come before him had fought in Germany, Russia, India, Italy, in South America and the Narrow Seas : Gilbert's own battle-ground was a few square miles, his weapons improved seed and patent manure, a vigorous tongue and some natural power to command. The fight had been hard enough, up to the present, to fulfil his needs, or at any rate to mask them : and only a year since he had discussed with his father a stock-breeding scheme for which there would soon be funds.

He shrugged slightly, and looked at Rab, who

thumped with his tail. "Aweel, Rab man, sae here's the end o' the sang," said he in Scots, and straightened away his letters. He would see Reid as soon as Anne was safe, and put the business of the sale in hand. But it could wait till she was securely settled. He had thought already of a place near Aboyne, a cottage on the edge of Dinnet Muir, where two years ago he had dismounted awhile, on his way home from the funeral of his nurse. The old wife who had given him a drink of milk stayed in his mind: the place was bien and homely: she had told him that she took lodgers in the summer, that she had been in good service before she married, with the chief of her husband's clan, at Invercauld. He would go there to-morrow, make inquiries: if the place would do, Anne was reasonably safe from recognition: he could see her as often as she would care for it. His continued presence, if it were possible, was likely to be more burden to her than comfort.

And meanwhile the business of the marriage itself. . . . He shrank from getting Reid to draw a settlement: that must wait till he was back in Edinburgh. The Reids thought well of Anne, had been kind to her, in the sudden scandalous clatter of Bertha's death. For her to marry in this indecent haste, even without its reasons . . . that would not do. An Edinburgh lawyer, certainly. And his will—a new marriage would make that invalid, but Anne must be secure of more than a third of the little goods he was likely to have to leave her: his next-of-kin was only a distant cousin, a doctor in Nairn whom he had rarely seen. The child, of course, was his heir: that startled him somewhat. Even suppose he died . . . he turned suddenly white. Suppose he should die before the week was over, leave Anne unwedded . . . a dozen ill chances flashed across

his mind, a slip on the cliff, a stone under his wheel . . . and Anne insecure. . . . He cursed himself for a fool. Three lines of writing with their names to it would have made her safe, his wife by law, if not very regularly, established her child as his, legitimate. They could have fulfilled the more regular forms at leisure. He cursed his own carelessness. A will, at any rate—that would safeguard her to some extent, at least, and if he wrote it out now with his own hand would need no witnesses, hold good to the wedding. He could have a more formal one drawn with Anne's settlement.

He got up and took his present one from the safe. It was dated a little more than four years ago, and the first phrase he saw, in the square-faced legal writing, was " my beloved spouse Mrs. Bertha Elizabeth Hadden or Keith." He remembered its drawing up, his former marriage. . . . Bertha in white, with an angular cloud of veil, flushed when they turned it back and made him kiss her, her air of thrilled and dignified importance, his own wretched sense that the business would never end, that the goatskin hearthrug under his feet would trip them. And the clutter of ornaments behind the minister. . . . He recalled a leering and rotund china cupid, his best man's hissed reminder about the ring, and Bertha, tugging at a white kid glove. . . . Bertha in white again, laid out on their bed, in a room with the blinds closed, smelling of narcissi, a Bible black under her chin, between thick fair plaits. His body moved a little under his coat, and he reached deliberately for a sheet of paper, began a rough draft of a will. But the thing was too simple : it would not exorcise his other thoughts. He jabbed his pen at the blotter for a while, fell to thinking out what he must

do towards the marriage. To be cried, to put up their names at the registrar's, were impossible. The Sheriff would be quietest, then have a priest go through some religious form—Anne would want that. He had arranged it so with Father Macneil, a little jowled man with a hooked beak of a nose. What other duties were there for a bridegroom ?

He had to remember his own past experience : his father handing him the leather cases that had belonged to his mother, Janet Kennedy, the modest diamond brooch he had bought himself, Bertha's flushed delight as she opened one and another. . . . He shrugged. The jewels were by him in the safe. But he could hardly make them gifts to Anne !

A vague wish stirred in his mind, that he could have given her something of his mother's. But naturally, Bertha had had them all. If he made Anne wedding gifts, they would have to be new. The absurdity of the thought drew a twisted smile. To be buying Anne jewels. . . . He wondered what form of speech he could use in presenting them—and had Bertha's vigorous arms about his shoulders. A wave of loathing brought him to his feet : the whole squalid affair hung foul on him like marsh water. He felt suddenly mortified before the women, resentfully naked to humiliation, and furiously defensive over Anne. She was his wife, or would be. Before God, she should lack no observance due to her. A bride had gifts : he had brought his gifts to Bertha. . . . But Anne knew that Bertha had had his mother's jewels.

He got out his keys and dragged open the door of the safe, flung the cases on the table, and snapped them open. The gold was dull with sea air, but the stones glittered, made goblin sparks in the lamplight among

his papers. He recognised one pendant of coloured enamels for the one his mother wore in the miniature whose dark clear beauty he worshipped as a boy, and suddenly let his head fall on his arms in the sheer stark isolation of a nightmare.

He sat back in a while, passed a hand over his forehead. Rab, aware that something was wrong, snuffed at his knee. He tugged the beast's ear, got up, and gathered the cases, but instead of replacing them slammed the safe door and thrust them into the pockets of his jacket, extinguished the lamp, and striding through the hall, went out on the green that lay before the Tower.

The moonlight smelt of salt, though the tide was making : the lap of small waves came up to him out of space. The Tower rose at his back, high into dusk. He halted awhile, the weight of his pockets dragging the coat on his shoulders, looking out to sea, then walked forward to the cliff, at the seaward edge of the tall berg of Kinnellan. The foot, even at low tide, was in deep water : looking over, he saw the pale line of the foam, and taking the cases one by one from his pocket threw them clear of it, in the smooth deep swell beyond. They splashed a little as they struck the surface.

The act released his helplessness for a while, with an irrational sense of something achieved. Then, naturally, it occurred to him, too late, to wonder if the cases would float. In fact, it was highly likely. On a rising tide, too . . . he had the full taste of his folly. Suppose the damned things washed up below the village, recognised, as likely as not, perhaps restored to him . . . if the finder did not think he had murdered Bertha !

He flung round, ashamed and furious, and caught his breath. There was a light in the Tower, in his old

window—in Bertha's window. It was only, as he recognised at once, the moonlight reflected from a pane of glass, but it brought a sudden chill of all his body. His hands were shaking as he got out a pipe : then he lit it and paced the garden up and down, through the scent of sweetpea and briar in the still sea air, while the moon wheeled south through spare and ghostly stars.

CHAPTER VII

"A bride's a pretty thing."
The Shoemaker's Holiday.

THE Sheriff's office was desperately close, and for all the merciless glare of July afternoon it was dark as well in the little waiting-room. A pallid clerk scratched busily at a desk, not heeding them. Father Macneil, who had come with them as witness, mopped his forehead and shifted on his wooden chair. A little thick blackavised man, he felt the heat, and though Mother Felicitas had squashed his protest, disapproved of the whole affair with cordiality. Gilbert, his hat and stick held on one knee, cursed the fat bluebottle, that buzzed in the window, under his breath again, and looked at Anne. The mahogany chair was a little too high for her: she sat on its edge in an awkward pose like a child's, her grey suède gloves tightly clasping in her lap. In the stale light he could only see half her face, below the edge of the veil that hid her eyes. The grey dress she was wearing made her strange: he could scarcely think of her except in black, and recalled her now as he had seen her first, in her heavy French mourning with the long crape veil. Bertha had taken it for widow's weeds.

A door slammed somewhere: she looked up with a start, catching her lip in her teeth. He realised then that she was badly frightened. The business had been too unreal to him until then for any sort of emotion to colour it: his journey down from Muchalls in the morning, his interview with a long and solemn solicitor,

Mother Felicitas in the gaunt parlour, the drive with Anne and the priest through a noise of traffic, the sullen heat, the grin of the lanky clerk. . . . He turned to Anne, and said reassuringly, "It won't be long now." The sound of his voice startled them both a little.

Then a bell chinked. The clerk put down his pen, and went to the inner door, then turned to Gilbert. "Now, if you please, sir," said he with a cheerful briskness. Gilbert gave Anne his arm—she was whiter than ever—and the four of them, for the clerk came in as well, passed in before the big desk in the other office. A tired grey handsome man with a legal face looked up at them shrewdly, rose with a bow to Anne, and sat down, with the pen in his hand.

"The names, if you please. . . . You have only one witness, I see. Well, here's my clerk."

The thing was over in something less than five minutes. He wrote his full name, "Gilbert Kennedy Keith." Anne hers beside it. The clerk was Roderick Macleod: he had looked like a Highlander. Gilbert paid the fees and put up the certificate, and the Sheriff bowed them out with a civil boredom.

The glare of the noisy street smote on the eyeballs. He handed Anne into the cab, made way for the priest, and sat in front of them as they jolted back. The noise, on the granite setts, made speech impossible: he stared at the shabby green cloth behind Anne's head, bracing himself to go through with the rest of the business, half wishing now that he had thought to refuse it. Anne was his wife now by the law of Scotland. But he guessed she would want her church's sanction as well, shorn as it must be of full observances. He had even felt a certain indignation on learning that she could have no nuptial mass, since her bridegroom was Pro-

testant. He was not quite sure what a nuptial mass might be, but the deprivation seemed a slight on Anne, though he was thankful to have the affair cut short.

The Reverend Mother came to the parlour at once, and led the way to the heavily-arched little chapel, where a boy in a cotta was lighting the altar candles. A sandy-haired young priest rose from his knees, and she introduced him as the second witness.

The close air was filling with thunder and growing dark. Anne knelt, stiffly upright, her hands on the altar rail : the Superior's heavy black sank down behind her. He followed their example, more from manners than capable of any sort of a prayer. But there was a queer stillness in the place, a sense as of something strong and kind and quiet. He looked at Anne, kneeling, and his dulled spirit was swept with a sudden heartbreak of tenderness. Somehow, she must be guarded and protected. . . . Father Macneil came out, in a white stole, and the young priest whispered tersely, " Stand up, please."

He said the words he was bidden, heard Anne's voice, very low, but steady, took her cold hand in his, and felt her take his finger-tips again. Her hold suddenly came tight on them for a moment : then she controlled herself, and spoke evenly, let go his hand. There was a sort of waiting. Father Macneil was holding a book to him, looking expectantly. The Reverend Mother turned and looked at him, then threw a glance at the young priest behind him, who jumped to attention at once, and whispered loudly, " The ring—give him the ring."

Gilbert gasped, horror-struck. He had meant to buy it on his way to the convent, after seeing the lawyer, and had clean forgotten about it until now. He turned

helplessly to Anne : she glanced up quickly, and the colour ran up like a flag in her white face, but she made no movement, and he looked over her head to Mother Felicitas, saying to her rather than to the priest, in a shamefaced undertone, " I haven't got it."

The Reverend Mother glanced at her own hands, and fingered her nun's ring a moment uncertainly. Then her face changed with relief : she made a little gesture towards himself, and he remembered suddenly his signet, the sard that had been his father's, with the Keith arms, slipped it off, and laid it on the open book. The priest spoke over it, blessed it, and gave it back. Anne's hand was like ice as he put it on her finger, that was far too small. He felt he had shown himself a bungling fool. Women set store by these things. He had hurt her.

His impromptu groomsman shoved him on to his knees, and the priest joined their hands again and laid his stole on them. A steady drone of prayers rolled over his head : the server's piping voice struck in with Amens. It was going to thunder : the chapel was very quiet, a quiet that seemed unbroken behind the prayers. Anne was motionless, her eyes on the tiled floor : she looked mortally tired. If only the thing would finish. . . . It was over, quite suddenly. They rose to their feet, and the Reverend Mother helped him about the fees.

Back in the parlour—he hated the place by now—there was only Anne and the nun. He had nothing to say. Mother Felicitas had tears in her eyes, but his bride had a white waxen face like death, and sat down stiffly, as if she was utterly weary of all about her. They seemed to be waiting for him to say something.

He said, " I'm sorry, Anne—about the ring. I meant to buy it this morning. I'll get it now."

She lifted her hand with a queer doll-like gesture, and the heavy seal hung loosely on her finger. " This will do quite well, thank you," she answered, in a voice that seemed as if she spoke in her sleep. Her hand sank, and the ring slipped off it into her lap. That made her start. She took it and held it out, seeming to waken.

" No, of course. I'm sorry. It's Uncle James's ring. I didn't remember."

He recalled then that he had no gift for his bride, was shaken with futile anger, controlled his voice. " It's yours if you'd like to have it. We'll get it made smaller. And I'll get you a proper wedding-ring at once." He dropped on one knee beside her, taking her hands.

She said, " No, no. I mean—thank you very much. But I might lose it—this one, I mean, of course," and put it back in his hand. He put it on, and would have tried to take her in his arms, but the nun moved to go out. He remembered her, checked the gesture, and rose.

" I'll go now. You'll be ready to-morrow at nine ? "

" Yes," said his wife.

The nun came forward a pace. " Can you not give him something to measure by ? "

Anne did not seem to hear her. He turned. " Of course. Have you anything, Anne ? "

" My garnet ring would fit that finger, I think. I'll get it." She rose stiffly, and went to the door. He held it open for her to go out, and was left alone with Mother Felicitas.

There was an awkward silence for a little. She said suddenly, her fine composed face twitching, " Be good

to her. Be good to that bairn, Mr. Keith. The lassie's broken."

He said with a kind of anger, "She's not broken. She won't break—Anne. But if she dies, I killed her. And I forgot the ring. I could have spared her that, if I'd had sense."

A clap of thunder slammed by overhead. They were silent again, an intolerable time. The nun said at last, "I'll go and see what's keeping her."

He waited alone, watching great gouts of rain splash on the window. When she came back she held out Anne's ring in her hand, three oval garnets, in delicate chased gold rims of the eighteenth century. "This is right, she says. But I don't think she's fit to come down." A bell had begun to clank somewhere about. "That's vespers. I'll need to leave you, Mr. Keith. You'll be wise to go, I think. She'll be better in the morning, I make no doubt."

He said, "You have been very kind to us both. I'll be back at nine," took up his hat, and went. It struck the portress, as she let him out, that he was an older man than she had thought him.

CHAPTER VIII

"We trauelled, both wearie of the way."
The Faerie Queene.

GILBERT drove up to the convent door at nine. The portress opened, and immediately turned to struggle with a trunk: he took it from her and spoke a word to the cabman, who helped him to hoist it in place on the cab roof. Turning back then, he found his wife in the doorway, with the Reverend Mother's black veil tall behind her. She came out of the broad arch into the sun, and he handed her into the ancient vehicle, and took his leave of Mother Felicitas. On the step she stood level with him, looking square in his eyes: her own had tears in them. She answered his hand-clasp warmly, and as he let go made the sign of the Cross with her open palm like a blessing. He bowed his uncovered head and turned back to the cab: the convent door clanged to as he got in, and a couple of errand-boys stood and watched them go.

He could not talk as they clattered over the setts. Anne sat in her corner beside him, saying nothing either. She wore the small grey bonnet of yesterday, with ribbon strings tied under the side of her chin, and a veil that covered her eyes: her mouth was quiet. He put a hand over hers, and she let it lie there, looking round to him once, with a slight movement towards him.

A flower-girl, beside the station, carried roses. They caught his eye, coloured warmly in the sunshine, and he put his hand into his trousers pocket—and then took it out. He could not dare give Anne what might savour

of a bridegroom's gallantry. She stood by the porter while he bought their tickets, two firsts to Dinnet. Dinnet is small, and they had to be written out: while he waited for them he had a chance to recall the last time he had bought two first-class tickets—at Muchalls Station with Bertha, going to meet Anne. He travelled third when he was by himself. He remembered her excited speculation on the stranger from France. . . . The tickets came through the grille.

Anne sat in her corner: they had barely spoken, and only phrases of necessity. Then the train pulled out: the long platform slid behind. They were clear at any rate of Edinburgh. Anne was with himself, depending on him, now. He could see, as they came into the full daylight, how white she was, with a pinched, transparent pallor. The succession of tunnels made speech an impossibility, but they came clear of them in a little while, and drew out to the pleasant country above the Firth. Then he remembered he had something to do, and sitting beside her felt in his waistcoat pocket, and brought out a tiny leather envelope.

He coloured as he took two rings from it, her own she had sent to him the night before, and one plain gold, holding them out on his palm. Anne started, read the apology in his eyes, and made an effort to smile. He said, "I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "You just forgot. And we had yours."

"I was a clumsy fool."

She smiled now, more like the smile that he remembered, and touched his sleeve as he leant towards her. He put the ring in place on the third finger, and gave her her own. She put it above the new one, then laid her clasped hands suddenly in his. He stooped gravely

and kissed them, laid them in her lap, and they sat in silence till they flashed through Dalmeny, and drew out high above the sea on the Forth Bridge.

She looked up startled as the great girders leapt, and he saw that she recalled the other journey, when he had sat beside her, Bertha opposite. But she had crossed the bridge alone since then. He dared not guess if she recalled that also, but said, steadying his voice, "Is the sun too strong? Won't you feel better if you take off your bonnet?" The Firth was intensely blue, with little ships.

She pulled at her bonnet-strings obediently, but the ribbon knotted. "Can I help you?" he said, and leaned forward to the task. Her cheek came against his fingers, smooth and cold like a flower, and his heart cried out with pity. He placed the grey bonnet carefully in the rack: Anne leant back with a sigh. "You're tired, my dear," he said. "You'll just lie down on the seat and rest awhile." She obeyed, and he covered her with his light overcoat, and lifted her head to a pillow of his knee, holding her safe with a hand about her shoulder. She looked up at him with a drowsy little smile, and he felt her relax to a kind of swoon of sleep.

The train drove on, swaying, through the green Fife country. Anne lay still, and a drowsiness beset him also, making ordered thought difficult: but he need not think. There was time for that when they got to Aberdeen. Just now there was only Anne, asleep at his knee. Anne . . . here and now. Not a dream, but Anne herself. Yet, since she could not be aware of him, she was like the dream too that had haunted his inner mind, been newly gone from every room that he entered, rode by his horse's quarter until he turned.

His half-exhausted drowse made her more unreal: he dared, since she was dream, take joy of her, defiantly. Anne. He was completed again, lapsed timelessly into that, through the breadth of Fife, not even hearing the roar of the Tay Bridge, till a sudden jerk roused them both. They had reached Dundee.

An elderly gentleman wrenched the door open as Anne lifted her head bewildered from its rest. He caught Gilbert's indignant eyes, who sat up suddenly, and withdrew with an embarrassed apology. Anne sat up again: her dark hair was a little ruffled, her eyes were sleepy, and she looked very young. He smothered a yawn himself. "Confound that fool! You were resting?"

"Yes. I've been asleep," she said, and rubbed her eyes, yawning helplessly, then smiled. "You're sleepy too."

"A bit. Won't you lie down again? Were you comfortable?"

"Yes. I was glad. . . ." She coloured, and broke off the sentence, but it glowed in his mind. She had been glad to be with him again.

She was touching her hair, with little fleeting gestures he remembered. He had seen her so on a windy day on the cliffs. She took a tiny mirror from her satchel, glanced at him rather shyly, and held it to use. He looked dutifully out of the opposite window, but was much aware of the trifling feminine process. It seemed to bring back a little of their old intimacy, of friendly cousinship and a shared dwelling, the old days before . . . He would not think of that. The sea was blue through the carriage window behind her. He kept his memory to those early days, walking with her on the cliffs, not knowing he loved her, to her eager face,

watching the passing ships, or reflecting his father's stories of an evening.

He turned as the mirror went back into the satchel. The brief space of sleep had rested her somewhat, it seemed. She had even a trace of colour in her cheeks, looked more herself. His tired face relaxed to a smile, of the old affection when they had learned to be friends, and she answered it, hesitating a little, in kind, then rubbed her eyes.

"You're sleepy still," he said.

She almost laughed. "I am—I can't keep awake. It's so stupid. I haven't—I haven't been sleeping very well, and then I went so soundly asleep just now."

"And that fool disturbed you! Have your sleep out—there's time. I don't think there'll be anyone at Arbroath or Montrose, and we won't be stopping again until Stonehaven." The name came out unthinking, and smote the two of them. He made no comment, but turned and reached again for his overcoat, so that they could not see each other's faces. It had never occurred to him until this moment that outside of Stonehaven they must pass Kinnellan.

There would have been no avoiding it, at least. From Stonehaven north both lines run over one track. The Caledonian might have had fewer remembrances, but it would not have avoided this, the worst. He settled her comfortably, without comment, but knew her less self-abandoned, less relaxed, and feigned to drowse himself, aware of that, and of heavy fatigue, resentful of any effort. His mind had milled through so many sleepless nights that now immediate action was not demanded it shrank from thought like an eyeball from the touch. The name of Stonehaven had roused more than remembrance. The express would not lift

there, but it stopped to set down. There might be no one, only the south mails. But he was known there as well as the kirk belfry. He had chosen a carriage near the end of the train, meant to draw the blinds: Anne would have to witness that. Yet fear returned to him: he had learned the taste of it in the last six months, of the worst fear, for another one cannot safeguard. The most serious danger was at Aberdeen, and there they would only have to cross a platform, at its far end. They must take the risk of that, and Stonehaven locals came in a good deal nearer the station entrance.

He scowled at the sea. The business sat ill on his shoulders. A reticent man, both by nature and by custom, he spoke little of what he felt, and showed it less. But deliberate concealment, for a purpose, of thought or emotion, much more of his actions, was foreign to the whole habit of his mind. He looked sombrely at the dark head on his knee, with a dull glow of anger that he was helpless, bound into furtiveness. Her cheek showed clear, and the curve of it, towards her hair, made him catch his breath, with a sudden crazy happiness. This was Anne, present again to his sight and touch and hearing, within the range of sense, not barely without it, a ghost unaware of him on these many nights. The joy was so deep, so little reasonable, that he realised it with a certain wonder. It did not occur to him that he might well hate her, who innocently or not, had shipwrecked him. But this sudden relief that her mere presence gave him, like water to a man whose thirst, ignored, is known to be formidable as he quenches it, puzzled him. He had known more beautiful women: he admired them large and fair, as a matter of fact. Anne was fine-natured, honest . . .

but others no less. Only, Anne was Anne, and because she was herself, she seemed to complete some circuit within his being that made full life possible. It was not rational: but there it was. He stopped attempting to reason about the matter, and let his eyes trace the folding curves of her hair, the delicate spray of fine curls by the ear and temple, and over the nape: they melted one in the other like waves at pause. Then he grew aware again—the knowledge of it came and passed like a changing wind—that he need not think of this or that about her. Anne was here herself, not a ghost that thinned at his eyes, not a haunting remembrance of voice or the turn of a hand, of a sight of her that was closed in past time or place. She was here, now: the course of each moment gave him more of her, was not a mere revival of what he had. He slaked his thirst in the realisation of it as the train went through the summer fields of Angus, till they reached Arbroath and her wakening withdrew her from him.

Luck stood their friend as far as externals went. He made a halting effort to talk to her during the stage between Arbroath and Stonehaven, but it was hard enough to find a topic. He was almost relieved when they came in sight of the sea, and ran into Stonehaven and outward danger. But no one came down past them, and their halt was only a matter of a couple of minutes.

In two or three more the Tower stood by the sea, with no flag on the staff, between the blue and the green. He had held himself, waiting for it, but drew in his breath, as a man might at the first stroke of the lash. Involuntarily, he looked at Anne, to make sure she had not heard: but she had risen, and was taking

down her bonnet from the rack, with her back to him. Then the carriage swayed, making her stagger. He had a glimpse of her face, and looked away.

An uncertain time passed. It could be only, he knew, a minute or so: they had scarcely gone through Muchalls. She sat down opposite, putting on her bonnet: her face was perfectly composed and normal. Then she asked him in a voice of matter-of-course, "Is that straight, Cousin Gilbert?" It was so much as she might have asked the question the autumn before that it brought him back to then, and it was naturally that he looked and answered, "Yes, it's quite straight." Then the "Cousin" reached his mind. She had tried for them, to steady them through this nightmare, to grip on normality: and it was over. He hoped she would not remember using the phrase, steeled himself to match the courage that made her do it, and began to reach down her dressing-case and his coat.

That, at all events, was the worst of the journey over. He had the practical problem, at Aberdeen, of getting Anne as inconspicuously as possible across the platform to the Ballater train. There seemed to be nobody he knew by sight, and her little grey lace veil was fairly opaque. His spirits rose again as they cleared the station, and swung into the long blue-green of the Dee Valley. Somehow, that they had seen Kinnellan, together, released some grip of apprehension: they would not have that first sight to go through again. And besides, they were out of his world now and out of Anne's: he had been up Deeside before, of course, but never as a matter of routine. The course of life and its problems could wait until Dinnet.

He turned to the luncheon-basket on the seat,

unbuckled the straps, and said, "You must be hungry."

She answered his smile, half-startled, and then responsive, with a look very like the Anne who had ridden with him on October mornings with bright leaves in the wind. "Why, yes, I am."

"That's good," he said. "So am I."

There was half of a cold chicken, and sour claret, with sugared apple tarts in a paper bag. She let him wait upon her with a smile: they were almost gay over the little picnic. Drinking the acid wine, he was aware that they were sharing a common meal again: it seemed to bring her back into his life, unghost her more than that bleak affair at the sheriff's, or the stiff nightmare in the convent chapel. It struck him suddenly that she was his wife.

He stopped in the middle of buttering a piece of roll, amazed, with a sort of acute embarrassment. He had recovered Anne, herself, complete, for these moments, and this new addition to her was something he found it difficult to cope with. Far more what else he remembered that was new. It did not seem relevant to normal experience, least of all to what he had known of married life. But she turned to him then with a question about the river, so completely the Anne of past time he put by the new things. This hour was holiday that he would not break. And the mood of that went with them until Aboyne.

CHAPTER IX

"But will ye gang to yon greenwood side,
Aye as the gowans grow gay?"
Lady Isobel and the Elf-knight.

He had felt that Dinnet Station would have to end it, but the outward affair of seeing after her luggage, then the sheer beauty of the place, still shielded them. The tiny village grouped on the road to Strathdon. They came through it: a pinewood strode dark to the west, with steel-blue water to the front of it, then a moor transparently purple with bell-heath, blue folding hills, and a rich air drowsy with sun, that carried the sharp sweet scent of the moor water, with pine and wood-smoke and honey underneath it. It broke on them suddenly, and made them halt. Anne stood and looked at it for a space of time, and he too: then very gravely she crossed herself. He suddenly knew her thought, and began to tremble, with a passionate lift of abasement and exaltation. He remembered dimly why he had chosen the place, for convenience, comfort, safety . . . but that was too remote now to be ashamed of.

He came to the cottage still in the same quiet trance. It stood in a little walled garden brilliant with flowers. Mrs. Farquharson, with bright eyes in a weathered face, and a mutch that reminded him of Mother Felicitas, had the rich homely speech of the upper valley, where a Highland lilt informs the broad Mar patois. There were flowers in the little room, against the light, and more on the round bright polished wood of the table, on a star of clean starched white knitting. Our Lady

of Lourdes, in china above the fireplace, faced out serenely from late columbines. He had chosen Mrs. Farquharson partly for that, because he recalled the blue-and-white Madonna, and wished to leave Anne among folk of her own faith.

He had to help the boy who had wheeled Anne's trunk to get it up the steep straight flight of stairs, to a little camceiled room hung with fresh cotton, whose dormer window looked to a loch and pines. He shrank from entering it, but made himself do so, and look round it to be sure she lacked for nothing. It seemed decently comfortable, though small enough. He left it with relief, and was glad to find, when he got down again to the parlour below it, that Mrs. Farquharson had her in the garden.

He stood and watched them, from the parlour window. The place in its shelter underneath the pine-wood was richer in flowers, by a deal, than his own windy policies at Kinnellan, but the light air that went through the trees beyond had a sound not unlike the ebb tide of a calm. Anne, by a rose-bush, moved in a way he knew. He thought, " When she is back again at Kinnellan . . . " recalled that she would not come there any more, nor walk by the slanting bushes in salt wind. He turned from the sun outside into the parlour, and was blind a moment. The shadow cleared to his eyes, and he took a sudden weariness of the place. It was pleasant, but he had made Anne hide in it. She was his wife, and loved him, and he her : and he could not bring his bride home to Kinnellan, as his mother had come—and Bertha. And Anne was proud. She had not reproached him by so much as a look, and he came very near to hating her for it, then flung up his head and went out to the bright garden.

"There's an hour and a half before I need go," he said. "Would you like to go into the wood? Or are you tired?"

"I would like to go," she said, and smiled her farewell to Mrs. Farquharson. It struck him to wonder what the shrewd old lady thought of what would be, now he considered it, a somewhat odd ménage for a married couple. He was completely sure that he could trust her: he knew the type well enough, and its fierce loyalties. Covenant, Catholic, Episcopalian history, no less than Jacobite, or Bruce's wars, were full of her like. But it was new to him yet to have to consider how any conduct of his must seem to another—least of all whether it would look odd or natural. He went silently by Anne, his mouth rather grim.

The wood was tall bare red pines, and sorrel beneath them, with bracken in places nearly to his breast, and a ring of young slim rowans, still starred with blossom. A light wind walked in it, making faint sound, and stirring the scent of pine and the loch water. Anne was silent. His exasperated mood sank into quiet again: he could hear the whisper of silk from about her dress, among the small sound the pines made over his head, and the two brought back the light hiss of foam in calm weather, heard half asleep.

Her voice reached him. "Can we sit down here a little?" They had come to the break of the trees about the loch.

He remembered then he had a good deal to say to her, of practical matters, money, his next visit. They were all necessary to her comfort—and surely a man might give money to his wife? But the business choked him. How could he offer Anne money? The grotesque impossibility tied his tongue. Yet it had to

be accomplished somehow or other. He tried to frame a letter in his mind, and discovered that he did not know how to begin it, so plunged abruptly, now, into the thing, and brought out a heavy wad of blue pound-notes. It would be simpler to ignore explanations.

" I'd better leave you some money to go on with. There's twenty pounds here. Let me know when you want some more."

Anne started. Her head went up, and her colour too. He could see her check the instinctive response at her lips, and did not know whether he was relieved or not. The bright colour spread from her cheekbones over her face. She said, " Thank you very much," like a well-trained child, and he put the wad of notes into her hand, avoiding touching her fingers. He had some gold on him, had meant to add that, but simply could not bring himself to produce it. The paper notes were somehow not quite so bad.

She fumbled for her pocket to put them away. The colour was still on what he could see of her face, but he breathed a little more freely. That was done. The next time, surely, it would not be so bad. And the money was the worst thing at the moment. It was easier to explain the rest to her. There was a doctor in Aboyne if she needed him, and a telegraph office in Dinnet. There was a chapel : Mrs. Farquharson would arrange for her driving to Mass, and spoke well of the priest, one Father Macnicol. He had made a list of shops in Aberdeen to which she could send for anything she needed, and ordered her newspapers and the *Ladies' Pictorial.*

She made a queer little sound, and he broke off, but as she said nothing, continued, urging her to take good care of herself, to go out as much as she could, to let

him know at once if she lacked anything. She assented gravely to all of his prescriptions, then looked up. "You are not to worry about me, please. I like this place, and—you have been very good to me." Her hand came on to his sleeve, and rested a moment. "I will be very careful, I promise you. And——" Her eyes came up to his—"if I want anything, I will ask you at once." He caught his breath a little. There was hardly more she could have said than that, and he was very deeply aware of it, with a queer unsteady pride and humility.

They sat by the water for a while longer, in silence. Then he looked at his watch. "I must go now, I'm afraid." She rose to her feet, and he went with her to the cottage, with an aching dread of leaving her there alone. She would not weep, he knew. She might even (but he was ashamed at once of the bitterness) feel some relief at seeing him go away. But it was hard to leave her by herself.

He turned round abruptly from the end of the wood, and lifted his hat again to the grey gown that stood in the narrow doorway past the flowers. In the train he had to wonder if Mrs. Farquharson had been surprised to note that a wife and husband, apparently on good terms, should not kiss as they parted . . . and then whether Anne had expected him to kiss her. To do so had simply not occurred to him, and the thought made him colour now with a kind of repugnance. But an uneasy doubt whether he should have done it haunted him till he drove through his own gate.

CHAPTER X

"My hounds may a' rin masterless,
My hawks may fly frae tree to tree,
My lord may grip my vassal lands,
For here again maun I never be."
Old Mortality.

THE late summer went on to autumn. The barley ripened, and the normal course of daily affairs at Kinnellan went on as familiarly as the change of the tides. Only its master's face was thinner and harder, and he drove his grieve and himself without any mercy. Every foot of the place, every building that belonged to him, fences and farm machines, came in for a sudden drastic overhauling. He had long had the estate in good running order: for its size and poor land it compared very well, in fact, with any other on the whole East Coast. But now it had to be groomed like a kitchen garden. Yet when Eassie, the grieve, thought the time was favourable to renew discussion of the stock-breeding scheme he knew had been a cherished plan of his master's, he was silenced curtly with "I have changed my mind."

Reid, Gilbert's man of business in Stonehaven, looked on approvingly. He had inherited Kinnellan's legal affairs from his father, who had guided matters for years in the late laird's absence, and discharged his trust ably and loyally. He had seen Gilbert change from a dreamy high-spirited boy to the sober efficient master of the place, and respected the clear head and firm hand he brought to serve it. The young man's marriage to Bertha Hadden had worried him: Kin-

nellan's son might have done better, surely. The lassie was handsome enough and a good housewife, with none of this new-fangled nonsense of Women's Rights, and though she relished her promotion to the status of a laird's lady, and showed it, she seemed decently grateful, and treated her husband with a proper deference. But still . . . when his wife had called on young Mrs. Keith soon after Miss Ogilvie had come from France, she had remarked to him, as they sat at supper, " It's a pity she did not come a few years ago," and he knew well enough what she thought, and agreed in silence. He had remembered the notion with sorrow later, when the esclandre of Bertha's death was new, and since he had met Miss Ogilvie by this time, had concurred when his wife had asked her to stay with them.

She had hoped quite frankly that now Mr. Keith was a widower " something might happen," and he had no heart to tell her that a marriage between the two would be nearly impossible. After all, she knew as well as he did himself the gossip that had flown about the country : there were five quite different versions of the story, that ranged from downright premeditated murder to pure defamation by a jealous woman, the belle of the neighbourhood, whom Keith had slighted. As a member of Skares School Board he knew the lady, who had been school-mistress there for over a year, and thought her capable enough, in fact, of the kind of ill-willed hysterical self-deception that every lawyer knows for a fount of scandals. That she might have been Keith's mistress (another version) he did not dismiss from the region of possibilities. But he had a real affection for the young man, was touched by Anne Ogilvie's youth and loneliness, and had a clannish loyalty to Kinnellan. Any bruit of scandal that

reached his ears was greeted by a grunt of devastating disbelief and a more or less explicit intimation that only a fool would listen to clash of the sort: and since he was well known for an able lawyer, the grunts did the young laird a good deal of service, the more as the new Chief Constable, Captain Loutit, who was not popular, was known to dislike him.

Reid, newly returned from a fortnight in the Trossachs, was settling into his office harness again, on a fine day at the opening of September. The hospital's affairs had got rather muddled: he gloomed at them with a favourite remark of his, that the Lord had not made the world with a committee, and proceeded to worry at the mass of papers like an elderly Aberdeen before a rabbit-hole. These silly women on the Managing Board. . . . He was interrupted at this point by his clerk.

"Mr. Keith to see ye, sir."

"Kinnellan, is it?"

"Aye, sir."

"Let him in, then, ye gowk. Ye needna keep him waiting." The clerk, a lantern-jawed youth new out of school, was learning with gusto how to impress a client, but sometimes failed in differentiation.

The lawyer rose to his feet as the young laird entered. "Come away in, Mr. Keith. It's a fine morning."

"Yes, the crops look well." Gilbert took the visitor's chair, and was offered a cigar—not from the box that stood on the lawyer's desk, but out of a top drawer. He made to decline it, and then changed his mind, but was a longish time over the lighting. Reid, used to watching the faces of his fellows, thought his

colour was queerly sallow below the tan. He reached for papers out of a wire tray.

"You'll be wanting to sign Cairncattie's new lease, Mr. Keith? I was wishing an hour ago you might be in. There's a cantle of land beside the Mill of Trigg that's likely to be in the market soon, I'm hearing. It would straighten out your march very neatly there."

Gilbert blew smoke out, very deliberately. "Thanks, but I'm not going to buy more land just now. In fact, I came in to see you about a sale."

The other looked at him sharply. This was news. "A sale, Mr. Keith? You're surely not for parting with land at the present? I warn you ye're no very likely to get a price."

"Perhaps not. But I must ask you to find me a purchaser." Gilbert stared at a dusty boot: his face looked old. There was a good light on him as he sat, and it showed grey hairs in the strong black by his temples. Reid knew by the tone of his voice he meant what he said—indeed, young Kinnellan generally did that—and postponed an argument till he heard further.

"What piece of land were you thinking of selling, then?"

"The whole estate."

"Good guide us, Mr. Keith!" A lawyer does not easily show surprise, but Reid was staggered. "You'll never sell Kinnellan!"

"Why not, if I can find a man who'll buy it? I doubt there will scarcely be much competition. But if I can, I want a man who will—look after the place, and so forth. Not let it down."

Reid was recovering. "You'll have your joke, Mr. Keith," he said indulgently. "Dod, man, ye took me in. I came near believing you."

"You can believe me. I'm perfectly in earnest."

"You'll sell Kinnellan?"

"I have told you so."

Reid drummed with the flat of his hand on the neat pink blotting-paper. "We'll need to go further into this, I doubt. Money is hard to come by in these ill times, but there's ways of raising it, at the very worst, without a step as drastic as this ye speak of. Your affairs, to the best of my knowledge, were in good order no a three-weeks past. You'll no can have dipped them as seriously as this, without it's the cards. I never knew you play?"

"I don't, or rarely."

He was considering what he would say, when Reid broke in, with a sudden hand on his shoulder. "Ye've aye had an old head for your years, Mr. Keith. But a young man's young, and trouble's black to the young. I'll not ask you how you come to be needing money so sore as even to think of this ye speak of. But there's many a way before that, I assure you. How much is't you're needing, and we'll see about it?"

Gilbert smiled painfully. "I thank you for your kindness, Mr. Reid. But I'm not in debt, any more than for current accounts. I can still clear those without interviewing the banker."

"You're no in debt? Yet ye talk of selling Kinnellan?"

"I have every intention of doing so, if I can. Do you think you can find me a purchaser, Mr. Reid? I want the thing carried through as quietly as possible. You won't be able to do it by Martinmas, but I'm not inclined to wait for the May Term. I should like to be out by Candlemas, if I can."

Reid was plainly bewildered. "But what in all the

world—— ? Well, if you're set on flitting, I'll do my best. But for God's sake, dinna make up your mind ower soon. If you're for seeing the world, can ye no get a factor ? I'll keep an eye on the man for you with pleasure, and remit an account to any airt ye please. Indeed, there's a man I could recommend to ye now, real steady, a loon from Buchan, Andrew Milne."

" Thank you, but I've no intention of keeping the place." Gilbert's brows bent. He had been sorely tempted to some compromise of the sort, though he knew it impossible. It came to him now, suggested by another, and the impulse to snatch back part of what he surrendered made his skin cold with the effort to refuse it. He went on, " I'm going abroad very soon. For good." He would have to tell Reid that some time, and might as well now.

Reid's own ruddy colour seemed to alter at that. " You're going abroad ? You mean for a permanency ? That's a serious declaration for a man of your established habits, surely."

" Yes. That's why I'll ask you not to make it public until nearer the time."

Reid was silent for a while then, and his gnarled fingers again beat on the blotter. " I'll need to ask you to be frank with me. Do you apprehend any danger from the law ? "

" From the law ? . . . you mean that business about —my wife ? "

" Preceesely that." The old man looked at him, very directly.

Gilbert returned the glance with equal straightness. " Do you mean, did I murder her ? It's more than I know. But I don't think so—technically, at least. And I know of no more evidence to hang me than there

was last spring. They haven't brought me to trial, and presumably they would have done it by now if the Fiscal had considered there was a case. I'm not dodging the police—that need not trouble you."

Reid stammered over an attempted reply. A man on the rack and near the end of his tether might have jested in that bitterly even voice. His client rose to his feet. "We'll call the thing settled. You'll try for a sale by Candlemas, then, if you can. Good morning, Mr. Reid. Don't trouble—that clerk of yours will let me out." His firm tread, with the slight jingle of the spurs, was in the outer office before Reid could move.

The lawyer mopped his forehead. "Now what in all the world has taken the laddie? Losh keep me, 'you'll sell me Kinnellan,' as cool as you please! And anybody that kent the man at all would as soon have looked to him selling the hide off his back!" He had even forgotten a half-smoked Corona from the box he kept for very favoured clients. For a Keith—and most of all for Gilbert Keith—to sell Kinnellan of his own free-will was a sort of outrage on the intelligence, as if two and four should suddenly make seven. That he had murdered his wife and was haunted by conscience was a thing that Reid did not believe a moment, and unless some queer hidden evidence came to light it was most unlikely that he would be tried, even for homicide, let alone for murder. One witness was useless, one discredited—or that at any rate was current gossip, and seemed well based, by what he knew of Miss Duncan. To be sure, there still remained Miss Ogilvie. But her precognition had been taken by the Fiscal while she was in his house. She had told him its substance. If her story were true, and he had no reason to doubt it, she would be a useless witness for the Crown.

He ran over anything else that might be possible, and could arrive at no hypothesis but that the police had been making things unpleasant. He would not have put that past the Chief Constable, a man for whom he had very little liking. He knew the hostility between the two, had seen them jar when Keith was on the Bench, and like everyone within a ten-mile radius knew that Loutit's investigation of Bertha's death had brought Keith into Stonehaven Sheriff Court on a charge of assaulting an officer of police, to which he had very calmly pleaded guilty. He knew also what no one else did except the Fiscal and the three people whom it most concerned—that they had quarrelled openly before that, and that Loutit's behaviour towards Anne Ogilvie had been the cause of it : she had told him that, as both her host and Gilbert Keith's law agent, when she had given him the points of her precognition. It was possible that Loutit had made trouble, might even have threatened—but that would not fit either. If any one circumstance more than another might be needed to nail Gilbert Keith to Kincardineshire, it would be an attempt to threaten him into leaving it.

He rubbed his bald head until it was streaked with pink, and could not hit on a probable solution : and since his affection for Keith was a strong motive, united with another even profounder, the need to comprehend the moving causes of anything odd that happened within his purview, he was thoroughly discommoded in his mind, and naturally, annoyed in due proportion. Money was not a motive, he could believe. A threat of the law would be a powerful one for the exact reverse of Keith's actual conduct. He might be weary of being a target for gossip : but that again made it likelier he would stay, confront all local tales, and face out the

matter—if he gave as much as a thought to the country clavers. Or his wife's death might have unsettled him : the Keiths had all a stravaiging drop in the blood : his father had been a wandering soldier of fortune for twenty years, his grandfather had commanded a privateer, and the generations in exile after '15 had sold their swords over three continents. But then, with his father too for a precedent, why not keep the estate and simply put in a factor ? He had been a good enough husband, but not so devoted that his wife's loss would sicken him of the place that was the major interest of his life. Not his wife, but. . . . Reid suddenly looked graver still. The explanation of the inexplicable was very frequently concerned with a woman. Scandal had clashed against Anne Ogilvie—but he did not believe in the scandal for a moment. The poor bairn might have been in love, perhaps, but she had certainly shown no sign of it beyond a quite comprehensible anxiety for the guardian who was her nearest thing to a kinsman. And besides, the lassie would be a nun by now : he knew nothing, naturally, of novitiates, but was aware, with a certain shocked disapproval, that these queer bodies were not allowed to marry. It was a pity that such a nice-like bairn should be led astray to such a crazy course : young Hailes, an honest lad and a decent match, was rumoured to be *seeking* in that quarter, and it would have been a very good thing for her.

At any rate, it was safely not Miss Ogilvie. Only—he started nearly out of his chair—there was that other hizzie, Isa Duncan. It was commonly known that she had made eyes at Keith, though what she would gain by it, seeing he was married, Mrs. Reid was too polite to speculate, though she railed at the fact as often as

Sabbath came round. In masculine quarters gossip was more explicit, with some envy at times of Keith's supposed good fortune. If rancour had motived the lady's charge against him (and undoubtedly she had set the police in motion) it might arise with equal chance from failure or from too much success in her conquest of the laird. He paid, it was true, very little heed to women: but a man of that type, especially with a vigorous physique, was precisely the kind to go down with a heavy crash if circumstances caught him off his guard. And Isa Duncan was distractingly pretty. She might have got a promise of marriage from him, or even some kind of actual marriage itself, irregular, but valid enough in law. And Keith, once sober after a gust of passion, was a man who conceivably might sell Kinnellan rather than give it Isa Duncan as mistress. The place had been to him a kind of religion, and Reid, though he had no local ties of his own, was Scot enough to understand the feeling. He looked more troubled than he had been yet. The thing was most deplorably possible, and he was almost convinced his legal intelligence had penetrated to the root of affairs. He went back with a shake of his head to the hospital papers, and some trivial blunder of his clerk thereafter got the latter roundly damned for an ill-deeded get.

CHAPTER XI

"Short days, sharp days, long nights come on apace."
Summer's Last Will and Testament.

THE late summer went slowly by for Anne at Dinnet, or rather she stood outside the course of time. On Sundays and holidays of obligation a Catholic farmer from the further Muir called and drove her to Mass at Aboyne, by Gilbert's arrangement. That made a sort of rhythm in her days, crossed by the less regular times of Gilbert's visits. But they made repetitions rather than a sequence: the priest might be vested in white for the Assumption, in red for St. Bartholomew or St. James, or rain might keep Gilbert and herself to the road instead of letting her walk with him on the Muir: but the difference was no more than the different chasing of the silver decade beads in her ebony rosary. Only the weather moved in a shifting course, like the wind's eddying on an even tide, towards the autumn and the fall of the year.

She had been wrenched from one fixed and static future, clearly defined in the whole of its outward course, close at hand and apparently as certain as death, and more immediate to the touch of her mind, and set here in this strange enclave of timelessness, beyond which was the New Year and Gilbert's child, and life with them both in a country she did not know. It made it more remote that the strange country had been well known to her father and her mother: her mother's tales of her marriage in Lima Cathedral, her father's of dusty street fighting in fierce sun, were part of the

fairy-tales of her French childhood, and stood in her memory beside *Cendrillon,* in a blue cover with a picture on it, on the upper shelf of her little bookcase in Blois. That she and Gilbert should inhabit them was as strange as to find herself in the Bois Dormant . . and Dinnet was nearly that to her, indeed. The country she knew was the Blésois and Touraine, the high open fields that went inland from Kinnellan, and this moorland and wood on the edges of the Highlands were as unlike those as the swift brown burns of Deeside were unlike the broad silver progress of the Loire.

She was neither unhappy nor happy, but simply rested, not looking either forward or back for the most part, but living each day in a quiet that had only the wind and the clear singing note of running water to move in the scent of honey and pine and moor. The two long hills of Morven and Culblayne rose unchanging in the changes of the light : the moon grew brighter in the lengthening nights, and the berries of the small rowans in the pinewood turned orange-brown and ripened to vivid scarlet. Gilbert brought books when he came, and sent her others, but she read no more than she needed to save his feelings, walking alone or sitting in the garden, sewing first at the remains of her own wardrobe and later at small strange garments whose tiny sleeves made a queer ache at her heart. With the passing of time and the milder airs of Dinnet a still and heavy peace came on her body, that took its effect in turn upon her mind. The present circumstance of her pregnancy, that Gilbert's life should dwell under her breast, and grow by her own, was too natural for disturbance : she thought of the child still only as being his. Long before it had occurred to her that she loved him it had been no less natural to her that he

should be the foundation of her thoughts, and since before she was violently awakened she had not reached to desire of more than she had, his daily presence and his friendly liking, it had not occurred to her to fear their relation until it had gone already beyond mere danger. Love between people who could not marry each other was a thing that might happen, certainly, she knew: but not to herself nor to anyone in her acquaintance. It was the easier now for her to return there in that her maternity had scarcely roused yet to any sort of a definite emotion. She felt the whole matter yet in terms of Gilbert, and then of the change it had wrought in her own life. The last made all other things too unreal for a while for her to suffer deeply over him, or as yet over the remembrance of things past: she had reached a final exhaustion of the emotions, from the profound shock, in her present condition, and normal reaction yet was impossible. That Gilbert should be forced, and because of her, to leave Kinnellan ran beneath her mind as a slow and steady ache that hardened to pain only when he and the place became realities, or more truly, when their future became real. Kinnellan stood fixed and changeless in her mind, in the windy autumn months of the year before, when she had been happy in the friendly household: and Gilbert, on his visits, was of that time.

Their stormy transflammation of each other, the blind stark wringing pain of the spring nights, the imminent horrors that had come in April, had sunk like a passing storm. They were friends again, a little shyly now and then at times, but not so much that they could not accept a silence. Their relation, indeed, was far less that of lovers than of the accustomary friendly liking of kinsfolk and housemates who without intimacy are

a pleasant and natural part of daily life. He showed her this and that in the Dinnet woods, as he had done on the cliffs and the shore by Kinnellan : they discussed their reading : sometimes Anne would sing. Only he never talked now about his work, though less from pain, or from any fear of hers, than because the dreamlike timelessness caught him also, and left him only conscious of being with her in a place encircled from all that had to do with the reality of his normal world, and even though Anne's condition grew more evident, he scarcely saw her, in any active sense, for more than a moment or two after they met, and then left the real world, with a past and future, for this region of an enchantment out of time.

Meanwhile the vivid colour of the Muir changed to the soberer purple of the heather, the cornfields paled to ripeness, were shorn to stubble, and there were touches of gold on the green bracken, red on the briars and the duller crimson of hawthorn. The stars were brighter at night, and the darkness sharpened with cold airs from the hills. Low mist hung over the valley in later dawns : the velvet was wearing from the stags' new antlers, and their belling began to sound in the hollow glens.

CHAPTER XII

"No wind blows fair, nor I myself can steer."
The Mad Lover.

At Kinnellan the pace of autumn sounded more clearly. Lammas came, and the hay. The barley ripened, the oats took a shaded pallor through their green, the high tides waxed to the springs of the equinox, and the grey grew more evident at Gilbert's temples as he saw to the affairs of his last harvest. It was one of the best that he had ever had, and he sold it well and early, reserving only what would be needed for the year's provision. It was odd to think, as he watched his men thatch the stacks, that before they had been cut down to their bases he and his race would be gone out of Scotland.

But in the daytime familiar work beguiled him to almost the same indifference to the future as the unfamiliarity of Dinnet. Only now and then, in some customary action, he would suddenly in an instant become aware that this substantial present was truly past, was already a finished chapter of his life, and these so well-known actions of his body were no more relevant to what he was now than a dead man's gaze from his accustomed pillow. Once, shaving mechanically of a morning, he moved unthinking to put down the razor, and suddenly the sense of this came on him, and he had to stop and think where it should go.

That was the days. The nights were clear enough. He lay stiffly in the room that had been his father's: he had moved there when Bertha had been laid out in their own. The oak tester of the bed, with the Keith

arms, rose behind him in the dark. He could see the form of the windows against the sky, in the faint sea-light, watch the stars go past them, and hear the tides shift through the hours, low under the cliff, and then he had neither present nor past nor future, for the future he could only see in negations, the past had no other meaning now than that blank, and the present so little relevance to himself that he could not catch at what yet was left to him of the things that he loved and still might possess for a little.

To his clear, vigorous, and active mind this lack of significant impact on his world was a torment like being physically imprisoned. As his first impulse to give up Kinnellan took its place among others he began to wonder if he had been a fool to surrender it wholly. Reid's suggestion, that he should put in a factor, came back to him often. He would still own Kinnellan if he did that, might return before he died, or his son might. When the boy was over twenty-five or so a year or two more or less on his age would not matter, or give much clue to the date of his mother's marriage. He recurred to the notion, with a furtive shame, but not very often when he was fully awake. He knew that unless he parted with the estate, or crippled it for good with a heavy wadset, he could not raise sufficient ready money to begin a new life abroad on any standard not likely to involve hardship for Anne. He had cleared Kinnellan and kept it free from debt, but had only lately been able to save a little beyond what he had laid out on improvements, and although he would have himself become a farmhand rather than part with it, there was Anne to think of. If she had married him of her own will he might have asked her to be a settler's wife, look after the byre and the feeding

of pigs and fowls : but since his act had forced her into the marriage, he would not, though he never doubted her courage, nor that she would face the grinding of such a life as bravely as she would sit a rearing horse. There was beneath that a deeper motive still, the more powerful in that it scarcely reached his consciousness. Twice he had wrenched her life clean out of its course. That, at any expense to her, he should hold to his own, was like leaving a debt of honour undischarged. And he would have pursued to the death any man who had wronged her : that it should be himself who called now for the vengeance made little difference to his deep-set instinct. He never thought of it in explicit terms, but deep underneath the level of his thought he needed to punish the man who had wronged Anne : and less unconsciously, though still with his instinct rather than his reason, he stood up to the payment as he had stood up to his thrashings when he was a boy, with unflinching shoulders for his father's riding-switch.

The thought of Anne herself brought him small comfort. Desire implies some element of hope, even although the hope may be known as impossible. He had lost her, so it had seemed at the time of her going, with a more fundamental and final loss than by death : and although when they were together she returned, in her absence the matter had another colour. With her, he recovered her early days at Kinnellan, before he had known he loved her : but at Kinnellan he could not go back to the time when he had not known it. It was not the old sharp hunger of soul and body, a clear desire, as clearly frustrated, but an uneasy mournful sort of craving for something from her he could not define to himself, nor, it seemed, hope for. She was set apart, no longer the fulfilment of himself, in terms of his own life,

that men ask of women : and the thought of the child served to deepen his sense of the severance.

It was his, certainly, begotten by him : he had a queer painful wondering sense of that. But enclosed in her life it was separate from himself, and she by reason of that separation : he could not feel it as his print upon her, any more than as the extension of himself. The wild clutch of his desperate madness that gave it being, even the swift clear flame of their first knowledge, left her still wholly virgin to his thought. He could not realise his own possession, and felt now, gropingly, with a hopelessness too dull for much resentment, that now he never would come to achieve it. It struck him at times that they were man and wife now : but the routine intimacies of his marriage were no longer a normal part of the course of life, but caused him a shrinking that would have been terror if he had not turned so quickly from any thought that brought Anne into Bertha's relation with himself.

Yet, on the nights when things were at the worst, he could sometimes bring an image of her before him so vividly she seemed present, and in that kindness might feel his pain suspended for a while. But her ghost would not stay. If he did not find sleep before it went from him, he would have to wait for morning and his work. And the autumn nights grew increasingly long till daylight, while the storms of late September yelled at the Tower.

CHAPTER XIII

" And if we meet we scarce shall 'scape a broil."
Romeo and Juliet.

October came in with a flurry of drenching rain : the inland roads were a bog of wet coloured leaves. Gilbert had business in Stonehaven market, and turned wet and chilled to the inn to wait for Todd, who had gone to fetch a saddle that was repairing. Three haunted nights in succession had dragged at him : the drive of the weather had roused him to a sort of futile excitement, unquenched by the easy business of the market, and he was still worried by an encounter with Reid, whose only offered purchaser for Kinnellan was a cosy little draper, retiring from business, a townsman born and bred, whom he knew by sight as a pink little man too narrow between the eyes. He revolted : he owed a duty to the place. Reid, torn with sympathy, had lost his temper, and his own had broken rapidly enough. He had flung out of the office shaken with rage, his last words " To the devil with your Peddie," and now felt a fool for it, though he still clung dourly to his resolution not to leave Kinnellan with a man of that sort. There must be somebody, somewhere in Scotland, who could handle it—and would be willing to do so. But he was beginning to feel a cold uncertainty. To sell was more difficult than he had thought.

He sat moodily and glowered at a whisky and soda, answering with a curtly civil phrase to the various market-day talk that came his way. Someone had opened an inner door of the parlour, and a piercing

draught blew from it. He was wet and cold, chilled with bad sleep, and like all men who live in the open he hated draughts, so moved to the side of the window to escape it, looking idly out.

For a while he saw nothing much but the general bustle of a market morning. Then his thoughts were focussed suddenly and unpleasantly by the sight of a broad back whose shoulders he knew. It was Loutit, the Chief Constable for Kincardine, and one of the very few men, outside history, for whom he felt a real personal hostility, one that he knew was sulkily returned. He had intervened, with considerable vigour, when Loutit had tried to force his attentions on Anne. In the subsequent clash of personalities, it was Loutit who had been worsted, not undeservedly . . . and had cut an ungraceful figure before a woman. He was not a man to forgive the fact, to either, and had taken his chance, in the matter of Bertha's death, to repay the humiliation with some interest.

Gilbert regarded his back without any liking, and hoped that he did not intend to enter the Royal. He was not in the mood to have energy for a quarrel, and could not trust his control to keep him out of it: and although he disliked the notion very cordially, he knew that for Anne's sake it was as well to be prudent. Loutit, in his official capacity, might possibly stir up trouble even yet.

He had almost a longing that the thing might happen. The man had twice already insulted Anne, had browbeaten himself in his own house: the hostility that had been latent between the two of them, since their first meeting, had not been fully worked out on either occasion. He had Anne's presence to hamper him the first time, on the second had been in handcuffs in a

moment . . . though he had left his mark on Loutit's throat.

His eyes were grim as the memory came through his mind, and he watched the heavy shoulders in their checked tweed. There was a movement by the side of the window, and his attention drifted away from Loutit as a stable-lad brought out a chestnut mare, a pretty, fidgety thing, near thoroughbred. She was sidling and flinging her head uncertainly: her quarter was towards him, and he put the movements down to the sort of temperament that one might reasonably expect to find in a young thoroughbred chestnut with two white stockings.

Loutit swung round to her, and made to mount, but she reared as he got his foot in the near stirrup, and had him all but under her fore hooves. He managed to save a fall and went reeling clear, then laced her savagely along the belly. She thrashed out behind and he struck at her again, wrenching the bridle: she plunged more wildly still. But she had got her head towards Gilbert by this, and as she flung it up he saw her bit.

He flung up the sash of the window, and vaulted out. The mare was half-crazy and Loutit had lost his temper. His switch broke in two on her quarter as Gilbert leaped: he could hardly keep his feet, and was thrust aside as Gilbert flung himself at the half-mad beast, and got the bridle, speaking to her firmly. She seemed to recognise the control of his voice, and quieted, starting and quivering, but no more. He went to work on the bridle, gentling her, and eased the tight curb-chain that had caused the trouble. A hand on his shoulder swung him in turn half-round.

"What the hell do you mean—Oh, it's you is it—

Kinnellan ? " The old-fashioned courtesy title was a broad sneer. " I'll thank you to go and mind your own damn business. What the hell do you mean interfering with my horse ? "

Gilbert faced him : he had the disadvantage in height : he was five feet ten, but Loutit four inches beyond him, and they were chest to chest. He had to look up to him, and it edged his anger, but the other's grossness helped him to control.

" If you had looked at the bridle instead of thrashing her, there would have been no need for interference. That curb-chain was pretty near breaking her jaw."

There was no effective retort. The thing was manifest. Loutit's furious colour deepened to bluish olive. He half-raised the broken whip, and then thought better. " You can mind your own damn business, Mister Keith. And if that devil's bitch kicks up again—— " He snatched the bridle out of Gilbert's hand, plunged at the saddle, scrambled for the off-stirrup, and spurred the unlucky mare through the lookers-on. Gilbert was left on the kerb, with a grey face. There had been a phrase of Loutit's as he mounted that he could not catch : he was not sure if one word had been " Ogilvie," or if that had only been imagination.

He went back and paid for his drink, ordered his horse, and rode home at a grim trot, with his jaw set, and a fierce revolt in every space of his mind against the conventions of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER XIV

" We that suffer long annoy
Are contented with a thought."
The Woman Hater.

THE rain, the rich windy sunlight of October, the starry nights over trees that stood barer beneath them, moved to November, and the rain returned, no longer as a wild drive on the wind, but a still damp with the smell of rotting leaves, that lifted at times to a pale and fugitive sun. One morning there was already a thin white snow riming the sodden plants of the Dinnet garden, and lying on the shore of the grey loch, and more heavily on the shoulders of the hills.

Anne went abroad less with the changing weather. Her burden grew heavy as her time came nearer, making her languid, and her mind was waking. She began to look again to a blind future, and fret for its coming, since it had to come. Its reality made the past more real again—not the peace of the pleasant former days at Kinnellan, but March and April, the morning after the wreck, Bertha red and happy with her triumphant news, and Gilbert's face haggard in a dreadful smile, that stabbed home to her spirit what she had brought upon him, what he had lost for her that she could not repay.

She woke to them in the long autumn nights, but some instinctive care for what she carried made her refuse, so far as she could, to face them, till this time should pass. It was easier in the days, for the tranquil soberness of their procession lay like a healing drug on her wrought nerves, and made it more possible to

suspend concern for all that lay beyond their immediate quiet. It must be dealt with, soon, but for just now her tired mind and languid body still acquiesced, for the most part, in the relief of present inaction : she need do no more than sit by her fire of pines, and watch the flare and crackle of the yowies.

Only her face grew thinner and more transparent, and she sat happed in a great grey shawl for the most part, though the rainy weather had not yet hardened to cold. Gilbert, seeing her draw it about her as they sat, screwed up as much courage as he had ever needed, and invading a furrier's shop in Aberdeen sent her a long cloak of deep crimson cloth, doubled and edged with fur of dark grey squirrel, and a little fur cap they told him went with it. When he next came she met him in the garden wearing it, and the colour showed bravely in a rift of sunshine. He had been pleased to find for her at last a gift more substantial than the books and fruit that were all that he had ventured until now, and Anne's own pleasure in the thing delighted him. She was touched by the thought and wearied enough of her wardrobe to enjoy wearing something new and pretty, and Gilbert's frank approval of the effect. When he said "I always thought you should wear colours," her own ran up as it had done in the past when he approved of a song or praised her riding. She laughed more gaily than she had done for long, and drew the soft fur closer against her chin.

There was rain and snow after that, and the first hard frost—not a mere sharpness at night, but a lowering cold, that sheathed the wet roads in ice. Then the wind shifted, and blew with a sullen warmth from the south for a night. It fell at sunrise and blew cold again : the clouds rolled back from the hills and let through the

sun. Anne's night had been a grey one, of many hours. When she slept, she saw Gilbert going about Kinnellan, and waking, knew afresh that he must soon leave it. She fell fully asleep towards dawn, and dreamt no longer of him, but of her childhood away in France, and rousing from that to a pale and tranquil sunshine, found Dinnet again between her and the nightmares. It was two days since she had left the house : she put on thick shoes, and Gilbert's crimson cloak, and went to walk in the pinewood by the loch.

She met the postman with a note from him, and read it as she walked : he was coming that day. He wrote to her religiously twice a week, formal epistles, beginning " My Dear Anne," and adjuring her to take good care of herself, but with no more of the love-letter about them than the " God keep you, my dear," that ended them, before the neat black signature, " G. K. Keith." She held his name against her cheek for a moment, and was folding the letter to put it in her breast when her eye fell on the direction to " Mrs. Keith." Gilbert had wondered whether the name was safe, but could not bring himself to ask her to change it. After all, there were Keiths enough in the North-East. She was growing used to the name, from Mrs. Farquharson, but this morning her first thought as she entered the wood had been " *Que c'est morne !* " and that sent her back to France, to the past at Blois and later at Tours with her great-aunt, and the good sisters of the Sacré Cœur.

The strange name made her feel Anne Ogilvie was lost. She should have ceased to be now, in any case. But she should have been rather Soeur Anne de la Sainte Croix, in a brown habit and white Carmelite mantle, behind the high chalk walls of the garden at Léry, instead of going in crimson in a Scots wood. Her

dreams in the early dawn had been of France, of the hyacinth flame of the Cathedral windows, circling the altar where the Maid had knelt, and the sad Scots princess "with the face like starlight," who had not lived to be the Queen of France. She had always thought of herself as Écossaise, had loved to hear of the Scots dukes of Touraine, the Dauphine Marguerite d'Écosse who came there for her wedding, Queen Mary holding the province for her jointure, the Captain of the Scots Guard at the King's right hand. She could see herself again in a starched white frock and a sash of the elaborate Ogilvie tartan, perched on a prie-dieu much too high for comfort through the long high mass of festivals in Saint-Gatien. Saint Martin cutting in two his crimson cloak . . . it was nearly his feast, when all the pensionnaires had dutifully gone to the basilique, to the tomb in the grim dark arches of the crypt, and lighted candles that made a circling glory. Her mind went from the remembered scent of wax to autumn and the colour of the vendange, and the tall golden willows by the Loire, their bright leaves blown as the wind came from Nantes and Brittany. She thought of her father, and then of old James Keith, the two men from whom she had learned her Scottish history, and that of course brought her mind to Gilbert again, as one may return to a familiar dwelling by a strange road that comes on it suddenly.

She got out her beads from the pocket of her dress. In such quieter times they were seldom far from her hand. Their touch brought her contact with safe holy things, and she could pray then, for Gilbert at any rate, though she had become unreal to herself, and the child, although she tried to think of it, was still an event to her rather than a being.

There was a patch of sunshine near the road: she went to it and walked there up and down. The weight of the future had lifted for the moment, with the tired contentment of a relief from pain: she was warm in Gilbert's cloak, pleased by the sunshine, by the intimate recovery in her mind of the tranquil past that gave her for a little the promise, it seemed, of a serener hope for what would be on her by the Feast of the Kings.

She walked there back and forth in the pale sun, the silver cross of the beads flicking slowly downwards. It was Tuesday: by custom the course of her meditations should have concerned itself with the Dolorous Mysteries, but it was to the Joyful that her mind turned rather. The decades of the beads dropped past her fingers as she went through the stages of the Holy Childhood, that Our Lady had kept and pondered in her heart—the Annunciation, Saint Elisabeth's greeting, the birth in the inn stable at Bethlehem, the first Candlemas, the Child among the great doctors of the Temple. Quite suddenly it came home to her spirit that she herself had gone into the hill country. She stood in a still amazement, confronting wonder . . . and then had before her not Saint Elisabeth, but Bertha, red and delighted and embarrassed. The familiar giggle broke through the *Salve Regina*. She stood with the bright cross gleaming between her hands, and faced between the trees to the open road. There was a tall man, who halted when he saw her: she thought for a moment that it had been Gilbert, and made to flee from him, and then saw his face. He stared at her, and broke into a run.

CHAPTER XV

" False love, and hast thou played me thus,
In summer among the flowers ?
I will repay thee back again,
In winter among the showers."

Old Song.

ARCHIE HAILES, driving down from Strathdon to the Deeside Railway, scowled as his horse slipped again and nearly came down. The thaw had been insufficient to loose the road, and under the trees of the long wood west of Blelack it was simply wet ice, and to take a horse, and another man's horse at that, over such ground, was a business he did not relish. The two miles over the Muir to Dinnet Station would be like a rink . . . the grey horse pecked again, dipping the trap so sharply that his guncase shot down with a sudden dunt against the splashboard, and he had his hands full for a minute or two to keep the beast from bolting as he recovered.

He turned angrily to the groom. " Is the brute not roughed ? "

" No, sir. I didna think there wis occasion. The frost hid louped and the wind set sooth yestreen, and there wis no sign of it back in the early morning."

" There'll be occasion enough between this and Dinnet ! The temperature must be dropping like a stone, and the thaw on this side has never gone past the surface. If you land the poor brute with a couple of broken knees you'll have your own damned laziness to thank for it." He was a peaceable young man enough, and had no love for rating another man's servant : but carelessness towards an animal roused his anger, and

further, if they must settle to a walk, his chance of the afternoon train was none too good. His pleasant blue eyes were annoyed, and there was some temper in his next "Come up there!"

The groom, with a very well-deserved bad conscience—he had been making love to a pretty housemaid when he ought to have been seeing to Sultan's shoes—said dubiously, "There's a smiddy at Ordie, sir, this side of the Muir."

"Is there?" He dug through his cleading for his watch. "We'd better stop there, then, and have it done. We'll save more time in the end by waiting for it, and I'd rather sleep at Dinnet or Aboyne than spoil a horse. Where's Ordie?"

They saw it then, at a cross-road ahead, and the clank of forehammers brought them to the smith. He was shoeing a horse, and the smell of singeing horn, in the dull cold, was none of the most pleasant. Hailes, waiting impatiently for the last nail, cursed the feckless groom. His own mood was restless enough: he had a night's bad dreams behind him, for reason, and the leaden greyness weighed on his naturally cheerful spirits, that during the last year had become less cheerful.

When his turn came the smith lifted a hoof, and pursed out his mouth professionally. "This'll neen dee, sir. I'll no can rough a shoe the like o' that. The peer breet'd cast it in anither mile."

Archie swore viciously and bade him carry on. The smith boomed at his lad to blow up the fire, and Archie's restless mood got the better of him. He cried an order or two past the roar of the bellows, paid for the shoe and the roughing in advance, and flinging his heavy coat into the dogcart left the guilty groom to follow him

when he might and bring his bag and gun-case to the station, then turned to the Muir, and tramped on by the grey lochs, towards the wall of pines in the Dee Valley.

The sky was coming lighter to the south. There was pale sunshine lying over Dinnet, but it was still a day to awake old pain. He had not seen Anne Ogilvie since Easter, but the boy's simple, steadfast, and upright mind did not give over a first love easily . . . and Anne, when he saw her last, had been sorely unhappy. He thought of Gilbert Keith, who had been his friend, for whom, being by seven years or so the younger, he had felt a boy's deep and loyal admiration. He had a bleak and aching emotion towards him, that had no name. That Anne should choose to love him—and she had told him that at their last meeting—set him apart from hate. But Keith did not love her, and Anne by this time was a nun in France : she had told him then her purpose about the Carmel, and though he could not have understood her motives, he had supplied her, since she had given none, with one of his own that he thought credible—the only possible reason he could imagine why a young and attractive woman should be a nun. Gilbert Keith, the fool, did not love her, and so Anne would be shut up in queer clothes and say Latin prayers, and no other man might have what he would not take. He cursed the Catholic Church and its institutions with a fervour that would have earned Knox's approbation.

But the lad was an honest lover. His own pain—and it was sick and keen when he thought of his loss still—meant less than the remembrance of Anne unhappy. She had revealed that unhappiness once before, the third time he had asked her to marry him : he remembered her bursting suddenly into tears, and wondered, in the light of his later knowledge, if the fall from her

horse she had given as her excuse were the true one, or her reason something worse. He had heard the clash of the country at Bertha's death, but little of it, in spite of Isa Duncan, had in fact touched Anne, and since he was known for her suitor, but little of that little had reached himself. A Scots countryside has an extraordinary power of keeping an open secret from whom it chooses, as more than one government has known in its day. He worried less over scandal touching Anne than over the thought of her cold in a cloister, half-starved, most likely. He had a healthy appetite himself, and his notion of convents came from *Marmion*. And still unhappy, probably, over Keith. . . . He began to see her then again, on horseback, or dancing with himself at the Hospital Ball. He could recall the pearls in her dark hair, that touched his cheek softly now and then as they turned, the lightness of her floating against his arm, moving with him to the singing of the violins . . . the waltz began to pulse now in his head, in a wailing tune that brought up a sheer ache of longing. He strode on blind towards the nearing trees, and some change in the light made him look up suddenly.

There was a little clearing to his right, with the sun in it, and in the sun a woman, a small wrapped figure in a crimson cloak, with something that glittered held between her fingers. If the gay colour had not caught his eye he would have gone on without a second glance. As it was, it held his vision for a moment: then he checked, for the lady in red was the ghost of Anne Ogilvie. He was so sure it could not be herself that his heart stood still: then she looked up, and he made sure it was Anne . . . and then with a sudden blinding leap of joy took in the crimson. She was not a nun, then.

He plunged from the road, then slackened, as the old awe of her presence returned to him, and went on more slowly. She put her hands to her breast, and waited: he could see she was very white, with a sort of almost translucent fragile pallor. He had caught at her hands, but fell back without touching her, and then choked over a torrent of senseless words.

She looked up at him silent: her face seemed all eyes, and they were profoundly mournful. His happiness faltered: he stammered into silence. Anne tried to speak, but had to moisten her lips, and her voice when it came was only a hoarse whisper, that could not reach him.

He said, "Oh my dear, I thought you were a nun."

"No." She achieved so much, but had to stop.

"You're not, and you're not in France. Oh Anne, my darling. . . ." He flung his arms out, but her waxen stillness suddenly checked his impulse.

She looked up at him, and her face was utterly sad. "I'm sorry, Archie." It was the first time she had used the name, and he was aware of it rather than the context. He caught up her hands and caressed them.

"My little darling. . . ."

"No, no—you must not. Je vous defends cela." She came back to English. "Let me go, please, Archie."

It was then that he *saw* the hands, and her wedding-ring. His body seemed to take in its significance before his mind. He had let go her fingers before it came clearly to him what the ring meant.

"My God—so that's it. But I didn't know."

She understood. "Yes. I'm married." The words were strange to her, more strange than the wordless sound he made in answer.

He was stunned a moment, then said haltingly, "But I thought . . . I thought. . . ." He checked the rest of it.

She mistook him. "I told you I was going into Religion. I was. But—but I couldn't. And I'm married." She seemed to cling to that as to a defence, as if her repulse of him needed an excuse.

"I don't understand. You told me. . . ." It came out then. "You told me that you—that it was Gilbert Keith."

She swayed at the words. He saw what he was saying, but it was out, and beyond apology. Anne gathered her strength to give him the mercy-stroke: it was bitter kindness, but better for them both than to let him go on. "I—he has married me."

"No! Then you mean—Good God!—But you're not happy."

Anne caught at her throat: the silver clasp came unfastened, and as her hands flung out to him in pity the crimson cloak fell in a ring about her. She stood there, her hands held out away from her body, in her tight gown, and he stared down at her. The horrified understanding of what he saw cleared in his eyes.

"No, that's not true, at least. Anne, it's not true! It can't be. You were going to France, and Keith wanted you to stay. I understand, Anne. It's only that, of course."

"No. You were right. But I was going to France. We'd loved each other. But there was his wife. She . . . oh, we couldn't! He would have married me then. But I knew we couldn't. I didn't know of this." She tried to draw up the crimson cloak about her, but could not stoop without falling.

"He *has* married you?"

"Yes. In July."

"In July . . . then—the damned hound!"

She shook her head, stiffly. "We did not know. He would have married me when—I was in Stonehaven."

"Then it's true. My God, Anne, but I can't believe it. I thought you were. . . . I'd have given my soul for you. And I . . . and you. . . ."

She made a small hurt sound, and it turned the whole of his resentment from her.

"Oh, God damn him to hell! To . . . he was your guardian, too. And you. . . . Anne, Anne, I should have kept you safe. I ought to have made you marry me at once, taken you out of that scoundrel's house to Pitarlo——"

"You'd have been wiser, certainly," said a voice.

Archie swung round, and confronted Gilbert Keith. Anne saw him too, and cried out. For a moment none of them seemed able to move. Gilbert's face was fixed and grey under its darkness, the light brown eyes had a bleak glitter in them. The bleakness was for himself and not for Hailes. He had honestly returned the lad's affection, and even the fierce jealousy of him later had been because Hailes's love for Anne was honest, as his own could not be, rather than that she might change. He saw himself then as Archie needs must see him . . . by good fortune it did not strike him how Anne must appear, for he had caught only the last few sentences. They had not heard his steps on the thick pine needles.

The two men faced each other. Then Archie struck. He put his weight in the blow, striking to kill, but Gilbert parried by instinct, stepping half-sideways. He drew back, flinging up an open hand in arrest.

"Not here, you fool! Not before her, at least."

He was nearly as savage as Archie, though less with

rage than with the accumulated need for action, thwarted for months, that was leaping to the outlet. Archie glared at him, drawn back for another spring, and Anne cried out and threw herself between them, caught her foot in the fallen cloak, and went down her length. A stump of pine took her hard in the side as she struck.

The two men flung themselves down on either hand of her. She looked up wildly. "No, no! It was my fault. Gilbert, you must not. Archie, he's not to blame. Oh-h-h!" A stab of pain wrenched a cry from her.

"Dear, are you hurt?" Gilbert was lifting her. He got her against his knee, but she hunched together. Archie crouched, quivering, not daring to offer any kind of help. He could see her suddenly go tense with pain, lean blindly against Keith. It seemed to pass. She gasped in a sort of whisper, "I must go."

Gilbert rose, lifting her very carefully. His eyes fell on Archie, whom he had forgotten. "Give me her cloak," he said. "It's cold for her."

Archie picked it up, and wrapped it round her carefully. She opened her eyes, and he thought her lips moved to thank him. Gilbert said then, "Get the doctor from Aboyne. They'll give you a horse at the inn. I'll take her home. It's Muirhead Cottage—by the edge of the wood there." Archie looked, then turned without another word, and ran at the top of his speed towards the village.

CHAPTER XVI

" Here is a thing too young for such a place."
Pericles Prince of Tyre.

It was quite dark now. Anne's window had long been lighted, with the flicker of fire beyond the glow of the lamp, and shadows moving, incomprehensibly. For the twentieth time Gilbert went in again, crept up the stairs, and listened. He could hear voices, the doctor's and Mrs. Farquharson's, now and again, very rarely Anne's, with a queer sharp note in it : once it broke off in a low shuddering cry, that checked abruptly, as if she had set her teeth. It was a long time now since he had heard it.

He let himself sag to a seat on the top step, and watched the light under the door, nearly worn out with a sort of helpless agony of resentment. He had always been used to the basic facts of life, of birth and death and the struggle for subsistence, and was free from a townsman's sentimentalising of anything involved in the three of them. But when a woman, especially if he loves her, is in danger and pain through the bearing of his child, the normal man, of normal decent humanity, goes through a space of profound humiliation, to which he may react in curious ways, to re-establish himself in his own esteem.

The doctor's voice spoke suddenly and sharply : he heard the old woman move quickly across the room, and started up. But there was nothing new. He sat down again, rubbing his knuckles against the tread of a stair, backwards and forwards, quite mechanically, till he

was half-hypnotised by the regular movement, and the light as the door came open made him blink stupidly.

He got to his feet. It was Mrs. Farquharson. She looked at his drawn face and shook her head, touching his shoulder pityingly. "Peer laddie!"

"How is she?"

"We maun jist hae patience, but it'll nae be lang noo. She's a brave wee leddy."

"How is she?" he said again. But the old wife was on her way to the kitchen, and busy about linen in a press. She flung a word at him over her shoulder. "Gin ye're wishfu' tae help, ye can pit up a wee prayer tae Saint Marget." She concerned herself busily about the linen. It did not occur to him that to pray for the intercession of a saint was an outrage on all he had been taught of religion. A man well used himself to giving orders, he naturally obeyed the person in charge, only wondering a little why it should be Saint Margaret, and not connecting her at all with the Queen. He prayed obediently for a little. "Help Anne. Please make it easier for Anne, and keep her safe," repeating it under his breath as he stood there with a hand on the scrubbed table.

Mrs. Farquharson left him to his own devices. He was only the husband—nobody's concern. He accepted his ignoring without resentment, and after a time went out to the dark garden, that smelt of frost and the freshness of the pines. There was a vast night over the woods to southward, with Orion rising. The sky was grey with stars.

A black shape rose by the gate. He smelt damp tweed, and knew the big outline for that of Archie Hailes. His own face showed in the starlight.

" Oh, it's you. I thought it was the doctor. How is she now ? "

He answered without any thought of hostility. " I don't know, but they say it won't be long now. It's well past eight." He had filled a pipe coming out, and added, " Have you a match ? Mine are all done."

Hailes felt for his own and gave them, without surprise. The lit match showed them a moment to each other, and the box recrossed the wall with a brief " Thanks." They said no more, but hung about uncertainly by the gate, each finding forlorn relief in another man, excluded from this uncanny women's business, where nothing could be done but wait and suffer. They were silent for what seemed a very long time : indeed, there was nothing that either well could say.

The dumb companionship broke as the door opened. Mrs. Farquharson was calling " Mr. Keith."

He sprang up the path. " What is it ? "

" She's speirin' for ye."

He began to shake horribly, and the old woman put a steadying hand on him. " Canny, noo, laddie."

" How is she ? "

" It's a boy."

" A boy ? What—oh, of course. But how is she ? "

" Ill aneuch, sir, I'm fearin'. But the doctor says there's a chance."

He groped up the stairs with a sense of suffocation, struck his head on the slant wall of the camceiled room, and turned to the bed, half-stunned. Anne's face was there, the colour of the sheets, and old with pain. The sight of it hardened him out of his helplessness : he came back from the queer suspension of all being, with a shock like a blow, crossed the room very quickly and

quietly, and knelt down, leaning towards her. But her eyes stared empty.

He said to her, " Anne," and she seemed to know the voice, and moved uncertainly, with a whisper of speech. He bent to catch it, and made out his name, and slipped an arm gently underneath her head. She seemed to recognise the touch, at least, and sought against him. Her hand came out of the sheet and fumbled blindly, and he put his own over the bloodless fingers. From the other side of the room came a thin whimper. He started, and looked. Mrs. Farquharson had a bundle in her arms. But Anne moved restlessly, and he went back to her. Her head stirred against him with a feeble unquiet, then her voice came aloud, high and childish, " Gilbert, Gilbert."

" I'm here. It's all right, sweetheart. I have you safe." He wondered if the last words were a lie, but his tone of authority seemed to reach her consciousness. Her hand closed round his thumb, like a small child's, and she grew quieter. A voice said over his head, " Make her drink this," and the doctor held out a glass. The fretful little wailing came in gusts.

He held the glass to Anne's lips, and spoke firmly and slowly. A man who has had much to do with animals is often an astonishingly good nurse. She drank obediently, and in a short time seemed to fall asleep. He put her back very gently on the pillow, happed the clothes about her—her hand had been terribly cold—and looked for the doctor, his eyes sick with a question. The little stocky man, with a tired face, was putting ugly bright things into a bag : there were queer odours. With infinite precaution he rose from his knees and confronted him. The doctor nodded reassuringly, and motioned him to the hearth. The old woman turned

to him with the shawled bundle. He took no heed of her, turning to the doctor.

"It's been touch and go. But she'll do now, I think."

Gilbert sat heavily down on the nearest chair. The old woman held out the bundle. "Here's the bairn, sir." Under the lifted corner of the shawl a tiny bluish face of infinite age, noseless and toothless, with blind hairless eyelids, confronted him. She put it in his arms: it was terrifyingly little inside the shawl, and seemed to have nothing firm he could get hold of. The toothless mouth gaped and drooled, with a weak wailing. He tried in a fright to give it back to her, but she had turned away from him to the door.

"Ye'll be neen the waur o' a dram, the twa o' ye."

"Hadn't you better—I might let it fall."

The doctor came to the rescue, balancing it expertly on one arm, and holding his other hand out for the glass that she brought him in a moment on a tin tray. But he did not assume the conventional cheeriness required of him normally in the situation. He let Gilbert drink his whisky off in silence, and gave the baby back to Mrs. Farquharson, who sat down with it again beside the hearth, then motioned him to the door.

The kitchen was lighted: they went into it.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Keith, you'll need to face bad news."

"My God, man, is she dying?"

"No, I think not. With any sort of luck we'll pull her through. But I very much doubt if we can save the bairn. It's a couple of months before time, to begin with, and I hear that there's some history of a fall. Your wife's had a shock of some kind, at all events. And—well, naturally. . . ."

Gilbert faced him and said nothing. He was conscious mainly that Anne had gone to sleep. The doctor was getting into his overcoat. He helped him on with it, mechanically.

"I've a case up at Ordie. I'm needing to see him to-night, and I'll look in again on my way home. Have you a lantern? My horse is in the byre. Mrs. Farquharson will do all that can be done." He found a lantern on a nail as he spoke, and lighted it himself. Gilbert took it and held it till he got his horse, and as he rode into the dark remembered Archie.

He was in his old place, watching the lit window, and blinked at the lantern without any movement.

"It's over. She's asleep. They think she'll live. The child's dying," he said curtly. Archie turned, put his head down on the gate, and began to sob, with an ugly hard strangled sound. There was nothing to do but turn the lantern from him and leave him alone, but as he went up the path Gilbert remembered the whisky in the kitchen. The boy must be half-frozen.

The black bottle was on the table. He poured a dram, and came back with it, neat, in the starlight, without the lantern.

"You'd better take this," he said.

Archie held out his hand for it, and was raising it mechanically to drink, with a word of thanks, when he suddenly checked the gesture.

"No, I'm damned if I'll drink with you." He flung the whisky outward into the garden, put the glass down very carefully on the wall, and plunged away from the place into the shadows. Gilbert went heavily back into the house, and creeping upstairs tapped gently at Anne's door. He heard no sound, so opened it, and went in. She was still in the same posture on the pillow. The old

woman by the fire had the child in her lap, but it had ceased crying. She motioned him to come nearer.

"I doubt, sir, ye'll be wise to get Father Macnicol."

"The priest? Do you mean—is she——?"

"Na, na. It's nae the leddy. It's the littlin. I some doubt he ocht tae be bapteesed immediate."

"Then you think——?"

"I doubt it, sir. He cam ower seen. The leddy winna wauken for a whilie. Gin ye wad ging tae the village and find a lad—they're Catholics at the second house tae the richt." He was going to the door when she beckoned him back again. "Na, bide you. It's a long road to Aboyne, and I some doubt we daurna tak the risk. We canna lat the wee thing ging unsained."

"What do you mean?"

"Jist that ye'd better nae wait for Father Macnicol. Ye maun dee't yirsel."

"But I'm not a minister."

"Ye're a Presbyterian, then? I didna ken." She looked perplexed. "I dinna ken fat's richt. Ye're the faither o' the bairn, bit—aye weel, it's wiser. We can be sure o' the intention then. Wull ye bring me the wee stoupie fae the wall?"

She pointed to a little brass receptacle, with a figure of Our Lady set above it. "Canny, noo. Dinna cowp the haly watter." He got it down, and she lifted the bairn on her arm, and dipped her finger-tips in the little stoup. "Fit's the name, sir?" Gilbert hesitated, perplexed. There had been none of the plans of expectant parents between him and Anne. He had not thought of a name. He made the natural choice for an eldest son, "Gilbert Ogilvie," but checked before he had said it. Not Anne's name. But his head seemed to be empty: he could not think of an alternative. He

said " James " at last : it was common in his house, had been his father's and his grandfather's.

Mrs. Farquharson nodded gravely, signed herself, and dipping her fingers in the holy water, marked a cross with it on the bald puckered forehead. " Jeems, I bapteese ye in the name of the Faither and of the Son and of the Haly Ghaist. Amen. Blessed Mary Mother, luik upon the peer wee waufie, and comfort yon lassie fin she comes tae hirsel, and her man. Saint Michael Archangel, shield the wee thing on the road, and keep it fae hairm, that hairmed neen. Lord, be aboot us. O Sacred Hert o' Jesus, have maircy upon us." The tiny thing had shrunk at the wet touch, with a little mewing sound, very faint and weak. Gilbert turned and looked at Anne upon the bed : they had shaded the light from her face, and he could not see it : their undertones could not reach through her drugged sleep. A mortal ache of pity drew at his heart.

" Did she ever see it ? " he said. " To recognise it ? "

The old wife shook her head. There were tears on her cheeks. " She fainted afore I could pit it tae her breist, and she hisna been clear in her senses sin' she cam roun'. And I doubt it will be gane lang or she waukens. Ye'll need tae be gweed till her, sir. She's nae sae muckle mair nor a bairn hersel."

" God help her. When will she waken ? "

" Nae afore the morn. Ye'll be wise tae seek a trifle o' sleep yirsel. The bed in the ither room's nae aired, and it's damp, bit the kitchen yin's at yir sairvice gin ye please. I'll pit oot sheets gin ye'll mind the bairn a while. I hid my clean yins airin' fin ye came."

He could not face watching the pitiful spark of life, that he could not help, and seeing it go out. He had a desperate terror of doing something wrong, of taking it

away from Mrs. Farquharson, who understood what ought to be done about it. The tiny whimpering cry had begun again, and seemed to claw at his heart. He said " Never mind the sheets. I couldn't sleep."

" Ye'll need tae lie a whilie, onygate. Ye're weariet sair, and ye'll need yir strength the morn. Tak aff yir beets, and lie on the tap o' the quilt. Ye winna fyle it. There's a muckle duvvet ye can hap about ye."

He lingered. It was growing in his mind that this small piteous thing that they had named was his son, James Keith—younger of Kinnellan. And Anne's child. That made it unintelligible again. Anne with a child . . . it would be dead when she wakened.

He turned and crept from the room and down the stair, and some blind tropism drew him to the fire. The peats had not been reested for the night, and were mainly hot ash. He put more into them, with a vague sense of duty towards fire. They began to light in a while, with small blue flames, and the flicker of them guided his dull perception to the box-bed with its print curtains in a recess. He got up and staggered towards its friendly surface. Sleep was impossible, but he would need strength, and was almost too tired to face crossing the room. He got one boot off, stumbled on to the bed, and was felled at once with a stupor nearly like death.

CHAPTER XVII

" Lang, lang, will my young son greet
Or his mither shield him frae cauld."
The Queen of Elfan's Nourrice.

GILBERT wakened of his own accord at last, to an extraordinary sense of blank emptiness, then opened his eyes. They fell on thick white fringe, then a dying fire, and a cottage room in the grey of a wet morning. He remembered then, and sat up with a groan. His collar-stud was digging into his neck, his eyes felt gummy and his chin unshaved, and the foot that still wore its boot was a discomfort. But these mere inconveniences of his body coloured his thought rather than clearly stood there. What was present to his mind was the grey window. It was dawn, and November dawn, seven at least.

He got stiffly off the bed, reached for his boot, and decided to take the other off instead. The drug must be wearing from Anne now, but she might sleep if only they could be careful not to wake her. He crept to the door : there was candlelight beyond, through the open door of the parlour. He went on.

In the centre of the smoothly polished table was laid the tiny body of his son, the little clawlike hands crossed on the breast, the lashless eyelids closed with a queer patience. It had been carefully wrapped in a fine napkin, and a wooden crucifix lay on its knees. Two bright brass candlesticks he remembered had used to stand on the chiffonier were at the head and feet : one had been lighted, and Mrs. Farquharson, with her lips moving, was holding a match to the obstinate wick of

the other. She lifted her head as it caught, saw him in the doorway, and put her apron to her eyes again.

" I've streikit him bonny, sir, but I hinna a flooer. The chrysanthemums is a' perished with the frost."

" Does she know ? " he said.

" She's aye sleepin', the peer lamb. And ye'se be the better for yir sleep yirsel. I wad hae callit ye fin—Bit ye were soun', and fit wis the eese ? The bairn's awa' tae Wir Leddy, and ye needna doot bit the Mither o' Jesus Himsel will mind him, the lamb, as weel as ye cud dae."

Gilbert could not speak the response that rose to his mind, that his minding of mother or child had not gone for much. He stood there awkwardly, in his stocking feet, and his creased coat and unshaven haggard face looked dreary enough in the raw early light. The frost was going out with a weeping sleety rain.

Mrs. Farquharson moved the candles into line : the little pale flames were ghostly in the greyness, as if they might vanish into it at once, as the child's soul had gone. He stood staring at them. There was more of human life in them, it seemed, than in the small empty husk that lay in between them.

He was roused by the old woman going by him. She put her hand a moment on his sleeve, and said " Ye'll need tae ready yirsel, peer laddie. Gin the leddy waukens seen she'll be needin' ye sair, and ye'se be mair gweed ye're shauvit and his yir parritch."

The thought of food choked him, though he had not eaten since early the day before. The meal Mrs. Farquharson had made for him, some dozen hours ago, had gone untasted. But a razor at any rate would be a relief. He followed her, and she gave him a kettle of water, a very blunt razor that had been her husband's,

a clean towel and a lump of yellow soap, and despatched him with these to the other little bedroom.

It was cold as a vault, and as airless, but he stripped, made some kind of toilet with the scant hot water. He would have given a good deal for a toothbrush, and very nearly as much for a clean collar. But the makeshift affair brought back his senses : the razor was a stimulus to sensation, for his beard grew stiffly, and there was no strop. By the time he had hacked a clearance of both cheeks he was very considerably awake again, and envisaging the practical situation. He must write a note or two as soon as possible, that would release him from various engagements. And ask Taggart to send on some necessaries—he fingered his sore chin tenderly—and wine : they must get Anne's strength up again as soon as might be.

He peered round her door again as he put his coat on, but she still lay unmoving, so quiet, indeed, that he tiptoed across the room in a cold panic. But her breast stirred faintly : he crept away downstairs, and was greeted by the smell of frying ham. Mrs. Farquharson had the table laid at one end : the fire was ablaze and the room in a sort of order, and she was making tea in a brown pot.

She summoned him to the table. "Come awa tae yir breakfast, noo, like a gweed laddie. I'se ging and sort the room fin the leddy waukens, and then ye'll can tak chairge. But ye'll nae be fit for't gin ye want yir meat."

There was sense in the statement. He ate obediently, and though the stuff tasted like wool, it did him good. Anne would probably need nursing night and day for some time at least. The trained nurse was still not a common phenomenon, outside the towns, and it did not occur to him to think of getting one, though it did come to his mind as a possibility to send for the big

housemaid from Kinnellan. Her devotion to himself he took for granted, but he was warmly grateful to the girl that she would have given the head from her shoulders for Anne. Yet it was wiser that as few folk as might be should know of Anne's whereabouts or her circumstances. If they could manage without sending for Katie, it would be better. Mrs. Farquharson was capable and kindly: he relied on her with the rather pathetic trust of the man who is helpless for the efficient woman who can deal with him as his mother does with a boy—and not show it too much. Her admission of him to a quasi-partnership roused him to hope and gave him a grip on his manhood. He had regained some impact on his surroundings.

His breakfast was quickly over, but Mrs. Farquharson had not come back. He was craving for and dreading Anne's awakening, but dared not go up until he had his orders. He wanted a pipe very much, but it seemed indecent with that tiny corpse in the parlour between the candles. The thought of the little curled hands brought to his mind a bairn in the village that had once been shown him, a dimpled thing naked in its mother's lap. The big young fisherman who was its father had proudly bidden him try the laddie's grip: he recalled the wee hand amazingly firm on his forefinger, the mother's sudden swoop, as it crowed, to kiss it, the adoring joy of the two of them in their marvel. His son . . . and Anne had never so much as seen him. They could not give her that pitiful shred of clay.

He sat staring blankly at pictures of his boyhood: his father teaching him to name the stars, his first pony, his joy in a brightly-coloured ball, learning to dive on the rocks, his first long trousers, Wallace and Bruce in a blue Macmillan Reader. He saw them not as parts of

his own life, but as parts of the life of a boy growing up at Kinnellan, increasingly sharing it, and his father's comrade. James Keith, younger of Kinnellan. . . . He would not have been : but there could have been the pony. He remembered a sturdy loon of three or thereabouts he had seen yesterday on a cottage threshold, hugging with rapture a long-suffering cat, and went to the parlour again. The sun had risen, in a watery pinkish sky behind the pine-trees, and the candle flames were dimmer and more fragile. One smoked a little : he snuffed it carefully. There ought to be flowers. Anne would have wanted them. One could telegraph to Pegler's in Aberdeen. . . . Mrs. Farquharson was calling from the stairhead.

Anne was awake, and lying with her eyes open. But her head moved aimlessly upon the pillow, and her eyes wandered empty. He came beside her. She was whispering something that had his name in it, but showed no recognition of his presence. A cold shock of terror brought him to himself. Anne was very ill. That steadied him : she would need him.

He said gently, " Anne," but the whispering went on, and she smiled past him at something he could not see.

" She disna ken ye, sir. Her mind's wandering."

" I can see that," he said under his breath. " When 's the doctor coming ? "

He came at eleven, but the time seemed long. Anne looked less deathlike as her fever rose, bringing colour into her cheeks, but she still wandered. As her delirium grew she talked aloud, but mostly in French and of memories of her childhood, as if she took refuge there from present pain. The husky slurring voice was not like Anne's, and in French it was very difficult to follow.

He tried to answer her as far as he could, reassuring her when she seemed to be troubled about what Sœur Eulalie would think of her *thème*. What he said reached her at times, undoubtedly. Her head moved restlessly upon his arm, but the touch appeared to comfort her a little. Once for a while she seemed to recognise him, and fumbled at his coat, with the ghost of a smile.

The fever gained on her through the afternoon, and they fought it as they could. The small husky voice murmured interminably, but no longer of France. She was back with Bertha in the Kinnellan garden, but her wandering mind seemed never to touch himself, save that now and then she cried pitifully his name, moving uncertainly against his arm, and turning her head vaguely from side to side.

He found in a while that although she did not understand what he said, the sound of his voice apparently still could reach her, and began at last to croon her into quiet with the Scots psalms that had been his own lullabies — *Coleshill*, *Kilmarnock*, *Martyrdom*, and *French*, the delicate flowers on the rim of a dark creed. There is in all the four a lovely patience, a sense of strong quiet waiting upon God, enduring in a reliance upon His peace. He crooned the airs of them over and over, though he could not always remember words to fit them: the rhythm of *French*, whose psalm he could best recall, made the tune difficult as he crouched by her. But they brought the tears to his own cheeks at last, and a sort of broken patience to his spirit, that grew presently into peace and a kind of knowledge of something underbearing his own strength.

Anne quieted too. The shrill husky note in her voice sank to a lower, less unhappy murmur: then that ceased too, and she seemed to listen quietly. Once

when his voice broke and he lapsed into silence, she opened her eyes and said to him quite clearly "C'est une jolie chanson, papa. J'aime bien t'écouter." Her face was so much a child's that he could not go on. She was smiling, and then said shyly, "Nounou me dit de ne plus vous tutoyer, parceque je suis trop grande pepuis ma fête. Mais entre nous deux, papa—quand je t'aime tant ? "

He touched her forehead gently with his lips, but could not steady his voice to begin again. She begged in a while, " Continue toujours, papa, je t'en prie bien," and he stumbled somehow then into *Kilmarnock* with the words of the fortieth psalm, in the Metrical Version :

" I waited for the Lord my God,
And patiently did bear.
At length to me he did incline,
My voice and cry to hear."

Anne was lying still again, and her face was peaceful. He took heart from that, and from the hope of the psalm. If he could win her to cease wearing out her strength. . . . He went on gently with the second verse :

" He took me from the fearful pit,
And from the miry clay,
And on a rock he set my feet,
Establishing my way. . . ."

The rock of Kinnellan on a winter morning, with the sun a crimson shield new out of the sea, that lay still with frost . . . the tranquil strength of it, over the tide, seemed to inform his spirit, and reach to Anne's. Her tense little body relaxed and sought to him : he laid himself down on the top of the bed beside her, and drew her to lie against him in his arm, crooning the psalm still with his cheek on her hair. Mrs. Farquharson, creeping up to them an hour later, found them asleep so in the candlelight, lying so still she feared that Anne was dead.

CHAPTER XVIII

"How doth the lady?"
Much Ado about Nothing.

ANNE did not die, though for days they had reason to fear it. When she was able to know that the child was dead, she turned and lay still with the sheet drawn over her face, and the fever blazed up again in her frail body. Gilbert dared not touch her that day, for she turned from him: but when he relieved Mrs. Farquharson's watch in the morning, after a long grey night, she let him feed her, with the passive obedience she had shown before. He had more success than Mrs. Farquharson when it came to making her take nourishment: she shrank from food, but would take it at his hands. He ordered lemons for her from Aberdeen, and made a drink with them Taggart had taught him during his father's illness, keeping it cold on the outer window-sill, for she was tormented with thirst most of the time. Mrs. Farquharson sat up with her at night, and during the daytime, when she took her sleep and guided the house, he took duty in the sickroom. Anne, conscious, gave them as little work as might be, but it was some time before they dared leave her alone. She lay still and silent for the greater part of the time, her small face peaked and sharpened in its outlines over the goffered frill of her white nightgown, that was very little whiter than itself. If she met his eyes he might win the ghost of a smile, and she would answer if he spoke to her, but briefly, and with no desire, he could see, for talk. He

tried her with books, but although she thanked him for them, they lay unread. His flowers had more success: she would lie and watch them, or their branching shadows that the fire or the candle threw on the crooked ceiling. The flowers and the fire seemed her chief interest now.

But she had a tough inherited strength of life. Her exhaustion began to pass after a while. She began to sit up for an hour against her pillows, to need less coaxing over her milk and broth. In a little she refused to be nursed at night: they could give her a bell, to ring if there was need. She made them give way to her, and the bell was silent, though Gilbert, across the narrow little stairhead, slept with an open door and ears on the stretch.

Reading was still too much of an effort for her: her hands were over feeble to hold a book, but he offered to read aloud one long afternoon, and finding her interest seemed more than merely courteous, went on. She had asked for something about Scotland, so he brought Galt and a recent book of Stevenson's. Reading aloud had been, to old James Keith, a needful accomplishment for a gentleman, especially one with not much singing voice, and his son had been thoroughly drilled once he was tall enough to grapple with the big folio of Froissart. He read surprisingly well when he warmed to the work: they went through the chronicles of Dalmailing parish with as much interest as its minister—indeed, the placid rhythm of the *Annals* has the same pleasure, once one enters it, as the growth of a cottage garden under the weather—and diversified it with Alan Breck and David. He was delighted when, as he brought the latter to the doorstep of the British Linen Bank, Anne eagerly demanded the next chapter, and was quite obviously

disappointed to find that the book stopped there, and there was no more.

"But Alan—I want to know how Alan escaped. Do you think he did get away to France again?"

"I hope so," he said smiling. "I like the fellow. Stevenson should have told us a little more. The book has no conclusion—it simply stops."

"Yes. There should be a sequel to it, surely. Isn't there?"

"I'm afraid not. It's been out for a year or two, and he's written a couple since. One's a fine piece of work, though I doubt if you'll like it as well—it's pretty grim. The last one's just Wardour Street."

That phrase was new to her, and he had to explain it. They were merry in the firelight and the dusk when Mrs. Farquharson brought them up their tea, and when he carried down the tray again he said triumphantly, "She *asked* for a second piece of toast to-day."

Her convalescence made it possible for him to leave Dinnet now and then for business, though he always contrived to get back by the last train, even driving from Banchory when he missed the through one. If his servants chose to speculate on his movements, they must just do so. December is a slackish time for farming, and Eassie, his grieve, had matters well in hand. There were one or two things needed about the stables that he would have preferred to oversee. They must wait his time . . . or that of the next laird.

The matter of leaving Kinnellan had for a while been blotted out by Anne's immediate danger: then the fight against her lassitude of exhaustion had made him deliberately put it aside. But when, on a fine clear morning in December, Mrs. Farquharson had put her into an elaborate new dressing-gown of soft thick rose-

colour stuff with fine lace ruffles (he had bought it himself, and sweated at the remembrance) and he lifted her in triumph to a chair and happed her in a great maud of warm grey woollen, he had realised that the world was still in motion, that Yule was at hand and after it came Candlemas. And the very next day, returning to Kinnellan, he found a letter from Reid, with news for him.

CHAPTER XIX

" Seest thou yon ither way,
That lyeth low benethe yon ryse ? "
Thomas of Ercildoune.

THE typewriter was not yet for a decent lawyer, and Reid's neat legal script on the envelope took him in the face like a blow. He slit the thing open, put his knife in his pocket, and lit a pipe before unfolding the letter.

" Dear Mr. Keith,

" I have secured a suitable purchaser, by name James Logan. He holds a tack in Gowrie at the present, but having recently come into money, is anxious to purchase and settle. He seems willing enough to meet you as to price, and from all that I have been able to ascertain, is likely to make a reasonable laird. If you must sell, he should fit with your requirements. I cannot say I should be pleased to arrange a meeting, but as I must abide by your instructions, I will naturally follow their effect.

" Yours very truly,

" ALEXANDER REID."

The truculence of the end made him smile painfully. He had a genuine liking for the lawyer, and in the sudden chill that came over him, was grateful to know that Reid would regret his going. The letter had come in too late to be answered before he must drive to Muchalls for his train. He put it in his wallet and went out, with a word to Rab. Taggart saw him out of the door, and he felt a sense of treachery to the old man.

As the dogcart turned to enter the green glen he glanced up at the cliff and the Tower that rose above it. The flagstaff rose naked before the early stars. It would not be long now before the flag flapped down as he drove through the green glen not to return again. It was not of Anne he thought on the way to Dinnet. The end of a Jacobite song rang in his head :

He turned him right and round about
Upon the Irish shore,
And gave his bridle-reins a shake,
With adieu for evermore,
My dear,
And adieu for evermore.

The faster sound of the train beat on across it, but it would not go. He would come down the valley soon again, past the familiar names, Aboyne and Dess and Torphins, with Anne beside him. And south to Glasgow : never to Kinnellan, but overseas. Well : they would begin again. There was land elsewhere, the fight with earth and weather—with hostile men, perhaps. His father's stories came back again to his mind, as the train rocked on the long curve by Lumphanan. In spite of his homesickness he thrilled to them, as he thrilled to the grip of a restive horse's bridle. The coloured names of Peru came to his mind, Oroyo and Cuzco and the Ucayali, the smell of hot sun and dust in his father's stories, the enormous space of the Pampas del Sacramento. He tried a few phrases of his halting Spanish : the first of them that came up was "*Vaya con Dios*," and it seemed a kind of good omen. They would win yet.

He took out Reid's letter and looked at it again, and a sudden revulsion of jealousy clawed at his heart. James Logan, riding as laird through Kinnellan gate, dining beneath the ceiling with the Keith arms, with

his father's port in his glass . . . he hated him, as a man might hate the seducer of his wife. He thought, "I won't sell him Admiral, anyhow"—and was ashamed of the pettiness at once. James Logan—that sounded like a Highlander: he knew it was equivalent to Maclennan. They were vassals or a sept of some northern clan, Mackenzie or Macleod, he could not be certain. He wondered if he were a Highlander by birth, with a certain prick of racial antagonism, then remembering that Anne came of Highland stock, was amused at his own inherited prejudice. A Highland laird at Kinnellan would not be pleasant, but at all events it was better than a townsman. The man presumably had farmed his tack, and would know a neip from a coulter, at the worst. It would be only decent to hand him over the notes of his experiments with fertilisers.

The train drew into Dinnet then. He got out, putting the letter back into his pocket. He would see Logan as soon as it was possible. Anne would be fit for a sea voyage by Candlemas, and since the thing was to do, then the sooner the better. If Logan came up to Reid's account of him, he could take up his lairdship at the quarter, without any need to wait for the May Term.

Anne, when he tapped at her door, was back in bed, but sitting against the pillows eating her supper, with the rose-colour dressing-gown about her shoulders. It gave her a certain adventitious colour, and deepened the darkness of her hair and her eyes, that brightened to see him enter, stooping sideways to clear the slant of the ceiling by the door. Mrs. Farquharson, knitting her *shank* by the side of the fire, rose beaming. "Is she

nae deein' brawly, sir? She was up twa 'oors, and nae a preen the waur o't. Look till her!"

Anne laughed. "I've been very good. Oh, what beautiful flowers!" He put down his chrysanthemums across her knees.

"I'm very glad to hear it. Yes, you look better. I think you've even a bit of colour to-night."

"My new dressing-gown!"

"You do like it?"

"Of course I do. And it's beautifully warm." She put down her spoon, and Mrs. Farquharson took away the tray. Anne lay back on her pillows: he pulled a chair beside her and sat there, silent, leaning forward with a hand under his knee, and gazing past her a little abstractedly. Then he grew aware that she was watching him.

She looked more like her old self to-night than she had for long. She was womanly and grave, her face still haggard, but no longer that of one walking in her sleep. By and by she spoke.

"Gilbert, I have been thinking."

"Yes?" He felt some regret at the interruption. He had been considering whether he should tell her their going was settled at last, and had not yet decided.

She went on, and he started. "You've never told me about—about the sale."

There was only one sale, for either. He did not mistake. "The sale? I was thinking of it this very moment—wondering if I should tell you just now. It's arranged."

"Arranged?" She looked startled. "You mean —you haven't sold it?"

"Not yet. But I've found a man who seems suitable. We can get away by Candlemas, if you're fit."

Her breast was heaving, but she looked less frightened. "Candlemas? Isn't that *la Chandeleur?*—the second of February?"

"Yes. It's the quarter. I didn't think we needed to wait for May."

"But it's not settled yet?"

"No. I'm afraid I've been rather a long time. But I wanted a man who would—look after it, and all that. I think I've got one. I'll get the sasine and so on in hand by Christmas."

Anne was silent for some time then. Her face was troubled, and he wished she had not forced him to speak of the matter. However calmly he contrived to take it, it was bound to disturb her, and in these last few days she had made good progress. He wished too for his own sake that she had let it be for a while longer. He was not ready yet to speak of it.

She had leant back for a while, against her pillows. Now she sat up, putting by her long black braid, and brushing her hair from her cheek with a sudden movement. She looked at him directly: she was trembling, but her eyes were steadily on his, and they checked his attempt to quiet her, make her lie down and rest again.

She hurled a question then. "Ought we to go?"

"How do you mean?"

"Ought we to leave Kinnellan?"

He had had to clench his mind so hard on the matter that to readjust or even question its values, at notice as sudden as this, was difficult. He said nothing, but looked back at her, astonished.

She made an obvious effort, and went on. "I know you thought it was necessary, before." She could not bring herself to be more explicit, and he did not grasp the sense of the last word.

"It *was* necessary, dear." He reached for her hand. That she should share his own regret for the loss touched him profoundly.

"I know it was. You couldn't have taken me there. Not . . . not" (she turned her face from him) "with Baby." The last word seemed to exhaust her strength for the moment. She could not go on.

Nor could he, for a sudden wild hope lit and dazed him. He faced it, and trod it under . . . and then, with horror, saw a possible meaning he hastened to put aside.

"Anne—you know it was for your own sake? You know it wasn't——"

"That you'd have been ashamed of me as your wife?"

"My dear, you know perfectly well——"

"Yes. It doesn't matter. I know you didn't think that. But—you couldn't let me face things. I understood. I would have faced them, rather than see you go. That is true, dear. But I knew you couldn't let me. And when he grew up——" She had to stop again, but confronted his eyes.

"It was impossible. I'd—dragged you into this."

"Were you any more to blame for it than I was?"

"Yes. I was. The whole thing was my fault, from the beginning. Do you think I'd let you foot the bill for it?"

"That isn't true. You would have gone if I had sent you away. And I'd have understood if I'd stopped to think."

"Exactly. And if *I* had stopped to think, I might have had some rudiments of decency. I knew, and you didn't. We'd better leave it at that. It won't undo the thing to discuss it now." He regretted at once the

harsh tone of his voice, for Anne's face had lost every vestige of its colour. But the discussion was impossible : he was the angrier with her for beginning it in that she was too frail to bear his anger.

She faced him again. " Yes, that is over now. And we can't mend it. But we've got to go on. When—As things were, you *had* to leave Kinnellan. Oh, I kept thinking about it, wondering if there was a way. But I knew you couldn't. There were ways, but nothing that you could have done. I knew you thought it was all your fault, though it isn't. I—oh, I would rather have gone back to it. But you'd feel you had kept Kinnellan at my expense. Wasn't that it ? "

" Pretty much. Well, what about it ? Do you think I'd have any relish for the place if I knew that keeping it meant letting you in for—Well, never mind. It doesn't matter now. I don't think we need argue over it."

She lost her temper for a moment then. " Do you think I like it ? "—but controlled herself. " But I want you to see—Oh, won't you understand ? I know you feel you have a duty to me. But what about your duty to Kinnellan ? It's your work. It belongs to you."

" It won't very long. I can find work somewhere else. This fellow Logan—Reid's a fair judge, I think. I told him pretty clearly what I wanted when he tried to make me hand the place over all standing to a fat little draper out of Union Street, who would just about know a Polled Angus stirk from a wedder, and have the village by the ears in a week. He won't have tried it again."

Anne beat her hand impatiently on the sheet. " Will you listen ? Don't you see it's different now ? If Baby hadn't died—— " She began to weep, in spite of her-

self, at that, stooping into her hands and rocking her thin little body, but at his hesitant touch flung up her head. "I'm not crying—anyhow, I'm not going to cry. I want you to see. Oh, *won't* you understand?"

He began to. The facts of the child's birth and death had been so much a dream in the dusk of Anne's danger that he had never fully envisaged them in relation to anything further abroad than Dinnet: and the mere danger itself had strengthened in him the profound need for an adequate sacrifice, not only as atonement for what he had done to her, but in some instinctive hope of propitiation, to stave away her suffering he could not help by any directer means at his disposal. The resolve he had gripped for the last five months was cracking. Indeed, the thing, if you looked at it so, was different. But he saw it also from another angle. Whether from good or from evil pride, or both, his mind revolted at "keeping back part of the price." He had promised the surrender of Kinnellan, and precisely because he hated so to make it, he felt the necessity of carrying it through.

He said slowly, "Yes, I do see what you mean." But he was incapable of adding more, for the reason that he could not express his thoughts, since he did not know at all clearly what they were.

Anne waited: then, as he said nothing further, "I thought about it—several days ago. I was saying my prayers, and it came into my mind. But I couldn't begin. . . . I thought you must have seen it. And I didn't know it mightn't be too late. But I thought you would have told me. And then I wasn't sure. I've been so tired. I tried to speak to you the day before yesterday, and—That was what made me cry. It wasn't the book. I'm all stupid yet, and it's difficult

to think. Things run away when I try to get hold of them."

"Poor bairn! Don't worry, dear. I do understand. But you mustn't worry about it. What you have to think of now is getting well."

She moved impatiently. "Mon Dieu, que vous êtes—Gilbert, do you think I am made of stone? Do you think I don't know. . . . Kinnellan counts more than I do."

"No. It does not. I should think that was clear, at least."

"I know you were ready to give it up for me. You wouldn't do less. But need you do it, now? Oh, you couldn't have asked me to come there if—if things had been as we expected them. But now——"

"My dear, I do see what you mean."

"Very well, then. Don't you think we should go back?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid it doesn't follow." It was hideously difficult to tell Anne to her face that she was bound to be a target for gossip, even although clear proof of its accusations was no longer flagrant. He took refuge in a silent obstinacy, his face more sullen than she had ever seen it.

Anne leant back wearily: she was nearly spent. Her courage would have surrendered long before now if the matter had been merely her own concern. She gripped her fingers under the edge of the sheet, and twisted them till the pain drove off her faintness. Then suddenly she discovered a new weapon.

"Gilbert, I didn't think you were ungenerous."

It failed to draw him. "You've had reason to think it."

"Oh, don't be stupid! Suppose it was partly your

fault that all this happened. Wasn't it mine as well? . . . Never mind whether you think so. I do at least. No, listen—I'm not finished. I want you to see. . . . You wouldn't let me bear the consequences—what people would say. You'd rather give up Kinnellan."

"Well, what——"

"Please wait. I haven't finished yet. If—if Baby had lived, and I'd gone back to Kinnellan, they'd have known that everything anyone said was true. They might even have thought worse things than was true."

That was so probable, or rather certain, that even now Gilbert turned more pale than he was. She went on without mercy. "You couldn't have let me face that. I deserve to face it. Bertha was my friend. But I do understand that you couldn't have stood by and seen it. And he'd have—I was his mother. If they'd said—But now—do you think that I can just stand by and see you give up Kinnellan, to save me from possibly being talked about? What do you think I'd feel? It's always been what counted to you most."

"My dear, I'm perfectly willing to let it go."

"I know you are. I know you would do no less. But ought you to? You've a duty to Kinnellan. It's your work, and you've done it. Uncle James once told me how you were nearly ruined once before, and you got it right again. You can't leave it now. He told me about the cattle—all you'd read, and how you thought the breed could be improved if you could get the farmers to—oh, I don't understand about it, exactly. But he said he couldn't leave it in better hands—that he'd loved Kinnellan too late, and nearly ruined it, but he thanked God you'd do better by it than he had."

Gilbert attempted speech, and could not achieve it.

She went on, her voice shifting and blurring painfully. "I know all that. You won't ask me to go now, to see you let it go just to save me from gossip? Yes, I know they'll talk. Very well. I deserve that they should. But at any rate——"

He lost his temper then. "Yes, they'll talk, be damned to them! Do you think you'll like it?"

Hers went after it. "Very well. If you are afraid, we'll go. There's no more to be said."

"That's not just, Anne. But if you can think that of me, I needn't deny it."

She repented instantly. "No, no. I'm sorry. It was unfair, and I oughtn't to have said it. I don't think it. I was angry. And I am. If you aren't a coward, do you think I must be?"

The fresh point of view was a little too much for him. "I never thought you were a coward, Anne. I never met anyone who had more courage."

She could not help laughing. "My dear, you are—a man. And I suppose it's asking too much of you to put yourself in my place for about five minutes. You're suggesting I should run away from—talk, and let you sell Kinnellan to let me do it—let all you've done for ten years just go down wind. Would you be flattered if I thought you'd do that?"

"No. But you see. . . . As you've just said, I'm a man. And I can't let a woman——"

"You can't allow her not to be cowardly?"

"You wouldn't be cowardly, Anne."

"No? I would not? 'Thay haif said, Quhat say thay? I'll run away'." She hurled the parody of the old motto. "You like that way of it better than 'Lat thame say'?"

"Damn it all, Anne——"

"You made me your wife, I think. I've a right to bear your arms, and the motto along with them. Or if you won't have that, there's still our own. It's "*A Fin*," and that means we haven't to run away. Father told me that as soon as I could read it."

Gilbert's eyes were blazing. She had hit on the strongest argument she could use, for deeper even than the loss of Kinnellan he had hated the sense of letting himself be driven into what had an ugly aspect of flight. He tried to hold on to his decision yet, but had been shaken in its citadel.

Anne saw it, and rallied the last dregs of her strength. "You say it isn't because you think I'm a coward. Very well, then. You force me to believe that you're ashamed of me, that you won't accept me for mistress of Kinnellan."

"My God, Anne, you can't think that?"

She moved her head. She had not thought it until the words were out, had caught at it simply as an argument. But now it was said, the doubt rose in her mind. "It might be. And oh—it would be true enough. No —you're right. We can't go back." She fainted then, so deadly white that he rose half-crazed with terror, and fumbled with a shaking hand at her heart. It took him a minute or more to be sure it stirred. He flung to the door and shouted from the stairhead, "Mrs. Farquharson, for God's sake get the brandy!"

CHAPTER XX

"I know my state, both full of shame and scorn."
The Forest.

ANNE was too ill that night for further discussion. Her temperature ran up alarmingly. Gilbert, thoroughly in disgrace with Mrs. Farquharson, was driven out of the room, and spent much of the night kneeling half frozen staring out of the window, watching a circled moon march up the valley, and seldom seeing it. The evening had left him thoroughly unsettled, apart from anxiety at Anne's relapse. Indecision, a luxury to many minds, a virtue to others, was to him a torment. His scale of values in conduct was clearly defined, and though his emotions or even at times his actions might controvert it, he did not permit them to blur. Now he tossed in a chaos where measurement was difficult, and his mind, distracted by new fear for Anne, could not grip. Her arguments were coming home. The case had certainly altered with the child's death. His duty by Anne, before that, had over-ridden his duty by Kinnellan: he had to choose the lesser of two wrongs.

But now the proportion seemed the other way. He was not quite capable of seeing Anne's point, that to go would be forcing her also into a flight from which her pride revolted no less than his, however she might have cause to dread remaining. But he felt it the more fiercely for himself in that it had now been put to him by another—and a woman, too, and Anne above all women. And her last attack had staggered him horribly. To seem ashamed of her, for any reason, but most of all

since himself had wounded her honour. . . . The cutty stool for them both, on a Sabbath morning, in face of a gloating parish, would be better—and though thirty years before they might have risked that, this at least, thank heaven, was the modern eighteen-nineties. They might possibly bar himself from the Sacrament, but Anne at least was safe from the Kirk Session.

What gossip might touch himself concerned him little. He had not sufficient vanity about him to enjoy being a target for public disapproval, and shy as he was he had liking enough for his fellows to prefer to be on friendly terms with them, however distant the actual intercourse. The chilly atmosphere about some of his neighbours, in the last eight months, hurt more than he would acknowledge. He would not, however, have conceived of it as a matter which might affect any action of his, but for Anne. Such things would count more to a woman : and for her too there would have been no mere speculation, but a frank flagrant scandal. Let her face that, after bringing it upon her. . . . Even now the thought of it gave him a physical sickness.

All the same, it was true that the case now would be different. He began to consider the chance of evil tongues. No one need know he had married Anne in July. Poor Archie Hailes would not inform them of it, nor Father Cameron. It was a full eight months since Bertha's death. Less than a year was not considered decent, for a widow, at least : convention, for a man, was more elastic, surely : they could not blame her. Everyone knew that she was alone in the world. There would be floating gossip to a certainty, perhaps the old accusation of Bertha's murder. But she was safe from the Court of Justiciary. A wife could not depone

against her husband. There might be talk, even yet: but talk died down.

He tried to envisage life with Anne at Kinnellan. It was easy enough, indeed, to see her there. If his thought of her had a local background at all, it was nearly always the garden of the Tower, or the gallery with the seaward windows open. The drawing-room had held too much of Bertha: he kept his mind from it instinctively. But the pictures were of Anne in a time that was past. To see her about the place in this altered future was an impossible effort. He gave it up. He knew by now that they were going back. She had made anything else impossible.

Mrs. Farquharson was stirring in the kitchen. He tilted his watch to get the moonlight on it, found it after two, and decided to go down, before she went to bed, and ask for Anne. She must be sleeping if the old woman had left her.

Anne's door was open, though, and a candle lighted. He halted, and her voice called faintly, "Gilbert." He went to her at once, and knelt down by her, with a face so anxious she put up her hand and touched his cheek with a gesture of concern.

"I'm better now." Her voice was a mere whisper. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be so stupid."

"It's all right, dear. Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you. I heard you moving. Is it late?"

"About two, I think."

"Oh! And you haven't been to bed."

"We thought you were—I shouldn't have let you talk."

"I had to. Only, I couldn't finish in front of Mrs. Farquharson." She pushed back her hair with a tired,

uncertain gesture. "I was wrong. I hadn't thought. Will you forgive me?"

"There's isn't anything to forgive you, child. And we'll go back to Kinnellan when you please. I'll tell Reid to-morrow—no, it's this morning now."

She caught her breath, and her face looked suddenly pinched. "No, no. We can't go back. You were right. We mustn't. I mean, I musn't."

"I don't understand, dear. I thought you wanted to. But if you'd rather——"

"I wanted you to go back. But—of course I can't."

"You'd rather make it Peru, then? Very well."

"No. You must go back. But you can't take me, I know."

Something flared up in his mind. "What do you mean? You're not—you aren't thinking of that French convent again?"

"I hadn't, but—no, it wouldn't be any good. They couldn't profess a married woman, you see. Not unless you were a monk at the same time. But there'd be somewhere else. Perhaps Mother Felicitas——"

"You mean you want to go away from me? Dear, have I hurt you? What in God's name is wrong?" He lifted her into his arms and held her gently, could feel her creep a little towards him: she was worn out.

"You can't take me to Kinnellan. I'm—not fit." She tried to draw away, but he would not let her. "You'd be ashamed of me—oh, not for people. But Kinnellan——"

He found his tongue. "Anne, that's pure nonsense. I—oh, I'm not angry with you, child. You're ill. You've taken this crazy fancy into your head because I've let you excite yourself too much. But you've got to go to sleep like a good bairn, and not worry about

such foolishness any more. We're going back to Kinnellan just as soon as you're better. It's our own place, and you're right about facing clash. I ought to have known you wouldn't be afraid."

"I can't. I'm not fit." Her face was out of sight.

He held her, appalled, and suffered a sharper pain he had yet undergone since he knew that he loved her. There seemed to be no possible form of words that would clear her mind of this ghastliness. It was a lie. But how he could prove it. . . He groped in the sheet for her hand. The wedding-ring slipped loosely on the finger. He put his lips to the hand, and then to the ring.

"Anne, before God, you're wrong. You're utterly wrong. I couldn't be ashamed of you, my dear. So long as you're yourself. You know that quite well. I've hurt you, I've dragged you into all this mud, but—dear, what can I say to a lie like that? I know you can answer anything I say by telling me that I would have to say it, in common decency. I know I should. But it isn't that. Look at me, Anne. You believe me?" Her head, against his shoulder, moved in forlorn negation. He could not tell her that if he had made Bertha mistress of Kinnellan. . . . That was impossible, even to convince her. And he dared not lose control of his voice or temper, in case she collapsed again: she was pretty near it. He tried again, keeping his voice in hand.

"You must believe me, dear. And if you were well, you'd see the thing was just fantastic nonsense. I would be angry if you weren't so ill. I'll swear to you by anything you like I never had such a damnable thought in my head. You couldn't believe it of me, surely, Anne?"

She whispered out of his sleeve. "I know you wouldn't think it. But it's true."

" It's a pure lie. And I'm the better judge. Kinnellan's mine. See now, dear, you've been ill. If you were yourself you wouldn't have these daft fancies. Trust me just now, and let yourself get better, and you'll see them then for the nonsense that they are."

She moved a little then, and looked up to him. He touched her hair with awkwardly tender fingers, and confronted her eyes, entreatingly. She spoke. " I can't think any more. I'm tired and stupid. And so thirsty. Can I have some water, please ? "

He moved to lay her down, but the door opened. Mrs. Farquharson entered with a chinking tray.

" I cud hear ye speak, sae I kent ye werena sleepin', an' I jist brocht up a wee cuppie tea tae ye baith." She shook her head at Anne. " Ye're an ill bairn ! A cantrip the like o' yon, and us thinking ye were near haund oot again ! But ye're some better, I'm thinking." She felt her forehead. " Aye, ye're nae sae fevered. Drink you up your tea and cuddle doun bonny. Ye'll be fine in the morning. And you, sir, tak yir tea, and awa' tae yir bed. Whatna-like nurse will ye be, wantin' yir sleep ? "

She turned a broad back to them, with emphasis, and he reached for Anne's tea, and held it to her lips.

CHAPTER XXI

" Yesternight the sun went hence,
And yet is here to-day."

Songs and Sonets.

ANNE's room, next morning, seemed to be longer than usual in being redded. He listened from the parlour to the old woman moving about in it, and went up anxiously when she called to him. Anne, with her hair newly plaited, lay on her pillows, watching the tidy fire and the frosty window. She looked the frailer for the night's disturbance, but still no worse than convalescent again, and *The Ayrshire Legatees* was beside her hand. Her eyes took in his town clothes and white collar.

" You're better this morning? Did you sleep properly? . . . That's good. I'm afraid I've got to go into Stonehaven." A faint tide of colour rose into her face. " Can I bring you anything? "

" Are you going home? "

" Yes," he said, with a queer thrill at the question.

" Then could I have some more Galt, please? There is more, isn't there? "

" Any amount. I'll bring you *The Last of the Lairds*. No—wait a bit. That may be too Scots for you."

She put up her chin at him. " ' Too Scots,' indeed! And what is my nationality, do you think? "

He looked down and laughed. " I'm not sure. It might be Elfland." The nightmare arguments of the night were over. It was a sunny morning, bright with frost, and they were teasing each other like old friends. " I doubt if they would talk Ayrshire Doric in Elfland.

Tammas the Rhymer's Queen sounds more like the Merse."

"And when did you become an Ayrshireman?"

"I'm half a Kennedy, you may remember." He stopped. He had suddenly recollected something. But the smile in his eyes, though it had changed, was still there.

He wired from Aberdeen for Todd to meet him in Stonehaven with the dogcart, and went straight through by train. Passing Kinnellan he looked out at the Tower. The morning was frosty sunlight on greyish grass, with the sea a cold green-blue. The Tower rose between them, with a spire of smoke going up from the kitchen wing, and the bare staff thrust arrogant at the sky, over a crowstepped gable. It slipped from sight, but his shoulders had squared as he saw it, his eyes had a glint in them.

He made for Reid's office. The little man greeted him dourly. "Aye, ye're here, Mr. Keith. I was expecting you."

"Exactly." Reid looked up with a sudden suspicion. That Gilbert Keith should be a little in drink—at this hour, too—was a new phenomenon. But his manner undoubtedly had a strangeness in it, "lifted" in some way. And his errand did not call for exaltation.

"You had my letter, then, about this man Logan?"

"Yes. I'm afraid I've put you to a lot of trouble. For I've changed my mind. I shan't sell after all."

"D'ye tell me that? Man, but I'm glad to hear it." He blew his nose like a triumphant bugle, and then recollected that he was a lawyer. "Aye, aye. Yon mannie Logan wasna ill. But I'm as well pleased to hear you're keeping the place. Your folk have been

there a while when ye come to think of it, and I've seen worse lairds. Aye, aye. Ye'll take a dram after your drive? It's cold enough to freeze the gulls on the wing."

Gilbert accepted the hospitality. They drank it with somewhat the effect of a toast, and he felt it a sort of rite of ratification. But he was eager then to get away, to feel his own land under his feet again. Driving out of the town, he had himself to wonder if Reid's whisky and soda had not gone to his head. He wished he could have ridden: he wanted to gallop, to stand in the stirrups and shout into the wind, instead of this cautious trot on a frosty road. When he came to his own march dyke he reined in a moment, and stared ahead at the solid clouds to north-east, seeing four seasons at once, with the Tower between them. He turned to Todd with a casual remark. "Snow before morning, by the look of it."

"Aye, sir. It'll tak the edge affn the cauld."

They drove down the green glen without more conversation, turned, and came through the arch of the low gate. The sweating drops on the stone were small ribs of ice, and the garden rimed in the shadow of the Tower. It was near two, but the place had a feel of morning: a waft of air brought him a homely smell of wood-smoke and cooking meat and the sea and frost. He went up the path with his head a little higher than it had been for some time when he was alone.

After lunch he lit a pipe and went to the business-room. There was a cheery fire, and Rab flopped beside it with an air of relief, then glanced up with a cocked ear and thumped his tail. Gilbert began to raid the back of a drawer. It held various small possessions of his father's, gathered from the King's Chamber after his death. There was a little packet of photographs, the

top one Anne, as a child of twelve years old, in the long white frock and stiff white muslin veil of her First Communion. The composed small face was very like her still. He put it down gently, and went on with the search, and came at last on a small morocco case. It opened on a tinted daguerrotype, of the kind in fashion in the early 'sixties, a girl of nineteen, of a dark and arrogant beauty. The eyes that looked out from it were like his own.

He made a little sound of satisfaction. The miniature that hung in the drawing-room had been painted of his mother after her marriage, but this was her betrothal gift, he knew. He closed the case and put it in his pocket, locked the drawer again, and went to look for Galt.

It was snowing heavily as he went up valley, the small purposeful snow that means drifts. The road was covered. The clouds lifted as he left the train at Dinnet, and a rising moon lighted him through the pines.

The snow cried under his tread: the wind drove in the branches. Last night he had come beneath them and thought of Peru: the coloured names echoed a little wistfully. He would not ride along the Ucayali, after all . . . but the crash of the surf beneath Kincraig sounded among the wind overhead in the branches. He stamped the snow from his heels outside the door, and went in. Anne's room was warm with fire and lamplight, Anne herself lying curled on her side with a book open, though she seemed to be dozing rather than reading it.

He made to withdraw, but she moved and smiled up to him, and he came beside her.

"Well? How do you feel to-night?"

"You smell of fresh air. Is it very cold outside?"

"Snowing, and pretty hard, too. How do you feel?"

"Much better." But she looked tired, he thought, and too fragile. He brought out her book, and then felt in his pocket for the leather case with Janet Kennedy's portrait. He opened it, and put it in her hand.

"I found this to-day. You recognise it, don't you? My mother gave it to Father before they were married. I thought you might care to have it."

She looked up quickly, and with a sudden movement kissed his hand. He snatched it away, colouring like a boy, and the case fell with a clap on to the floor. He dived for it, scared. If the thing had broken now. . . . But it was safe enough. He laid it beside her, and began to talk about *The Last of the Lairds*, till Mrs. Farquharson brought her bread and milk.

When he came back, after eating his own supper, to say good-night before her light was put out, he found that she had fallen asleep already, with the case of the photograph tucked under her chin, and her face was happier than he had seen it, asleep or awake, for a time that was long enough.

CHAPTER XXII

"Shortly, I believe,
His second marriage shall be published."
Henry VIII.

YULE turned the year, with still frosts and coloured sunsets: the stars lit flashing in the long green twilights, and Orion with the bright sword at his belt strode the south-country in immense clear darkness. There was snow, not deep, but hard-frozen, with sharp blue shadows: the sea boomed on the rocks beneath Kinnellan, and the gulls quarrelled, stooping to the water, for flotsam caught in the breaking of the surf.

Gilbert rode in one night as the moon rose. A thin wind blew from the sea, like naked steel, and the sky to the north was waving with greenish fire. The stillness of a northern winter's night is like a sword poised high at the salute. He waited, reining his horse, and faced the Dancers, like a man confronting a challenge. Only to-morrow, and he must bring Anne from Dinnet, and after that—— His knees took a harder grip on the saddle leather. There were the old antagonists, earth and sky, but more than these, now he had Anne to safeguard. To have faced steel, or even outspoken words, he would have relished, if only she had been clear. But she was his hostage, and the terms were other: words going unheard by himself, whose content and direction—existence, even—he could not be sure of. He faced the sworded night, his exaltation chilling to anguished fury, for it was himself who had brought this upon her, and there was nothing he could do to guard.

His horse pretended to shy at a black thorn-tree, and the jingle of the flung bridle brought him once more to the present night and the head of the green glen, that was like, with the seaward moon in face of it, a drawing on greyish paper with Indian ink. He shook the beast to a trot, and rode on down it, his stirrup-irons and the silver butt of his whip catching the moonrays. There were lights in the Tower.

When he had dined he looked up and spoke to Taggart. "You can tell the women to get the place redd up. I've married Miss Anne, and I'm bringing her home this week. On Saturday, probably, but I'll let you know."

The stopper that Taggart was setting in a decanter made a sudden jingling sound against the neck. For the first time in Gilbert's recollection the old man looked startled.

"Ye were saying, sir?"

"Miss Anne is coming back at the end of the week. I've married her. You can tell them to get the place ready."

"Vera guid, sir." He found some errand to the sideboard, that turned his back on his master. Gilbert's fingers tightened on the stem of his glass. That Taggart should be surprised was only natural, but he had expected a less frosty reception.

The old man turned round again. "I make bauld tae wish ye baith the best o' fortune, sir." There was no doubt whatever that he meant it. But his master knew very well what he was thinking. There were not many men to whom he would have defended himself at any time, but Taggart was one of them. He said now, quietly, "She's not fit to be alone in that place now.

And she's better here than back in Edinburgh." Taggart knew, of course, that she had been gravely ill, as the reason for his master's absence from home.

He brightened a little. "Aye, sir, that's like eneuch. It's a sour place, Edinburgh, and the noise of it wad drive an invalid near hand demented."

"Exactly. I thought she would be better here."

"Aye, sir. Nae doots. I'll need to tell thae weemen."

"Of course. They'll have to put the place to rights. Her room and so on."

"Aye, sir. The wee room oot past the King's Chamber—it was the dressing-room in yir mither's time. Ye'll wish the same arrangement, I dinna doot. The cairpet's sair worn. I doot it's advisable to put in a new one."

Gilbert looked somewhat fixedly at his glass. "No need for that. You can get her own room ready. See that they air it well."

"Aye, sir. I'll do that. Will you take your coffee here or in the drawing-room?"

"You can bring it upstairs." Gilbert wanted to be rid of him, and was, immediately. Nor did he, when he came up with the little tray, find any observation to make further.

Left alone, with his coffee and a cigarette, Gilbert stared moodily at the red fire. He felt chilled by this opening of the new campaign, and Taggart's natural enough assumption about domestic arrangements had disturbed him. He had thought often enough of Anne at Kinnellan, in the past, in a vague continuation of it, even, at times when he thought of the outer world, as his wife, as something for which he was responsible, as he was for the estate. He had wondered how she would feel, being back there. But that her coming should

alter their present relation, set her in Bertha's place, of bed and board, was a thing that till now he had never fully confronted. He went hot like a decent lad at a bawdy story. He could not ask that of her—not now, at least : nor had he, indeed, the smallest desire to do so. She would know it, of course . . . a queer tormenting image, of a strand of dark hair trailing between white breasts, rose, and he turned his mind from it with repugnance. Nothing of that sort. Oh, some time, perhaps. After all, he was her husband. But not yet. He flung his cigarette-butt into the fire, and looked at the room. She would probably want to change it : it was a bride's privilege, in her new home. He had to remember Bertha : the blue silk mantel-border with ball fringe, the curtains below, had been her innovation. They were the current fashion, certainly, but although neither he nor his father had protested, for the drawing-room certainly was a woman's affair, they both of them preferred the slim green marble. He had half a hope that Anne might revert to it : then had a sense that they could not tamper, in decency. Bertha, poor soul, was his wife. No : Anne was that. Anne . . . a sore passion of tenderness rose in him. He could not undo the wrong he had done his wife : but Anne . . . what he could at least. . . . He got up suddenly, lighted a candle at what had been Bertha's desk, and going to the door that gave on the stairs, mounted them slowly.

He had not been up them, above the drawing-room, for months. Their familiarity was ghostly : he had mounted, so, with the candle in his hand, so many windy nights since he was a boy. There was a chip in the polished stone of the rail, below his door : he felt it with his finger, the little familiar sudden edge of it.

The doors gave on the smooth curved wall of the turn-

pike, each set in a recess of the wall's thickness. The first was that of his old room. He entered. It smelt cold and shut up: the windows were bare, the bed a skeleton with dismantled hangings, the glass a black shape by a window with frosty stars. He had come in so scores of times at night, seen Bertha's flaxen hair on her handsome shoulders. He shivered, and went from the place. The next door was Anne's.

He did not want to go in. The wind was rising, and the sound of it and the sea, the smell of stone, brought back the night of the wreck when he had stood there, with Anne's rain-wet hair in the dark across his mouth. The blood stirred queerly in his wrists and hands. The memory fused with another, of himself slinking from door to door in cold spring daylight. He stood still, and then knew he was horribly afraid, so thrust at the door. It opened with a clatter, against some chair or small table at its back. The room was grey moonlight through uncurtained windows, that caught the glass, like a shield of greenish silver, and showed the high curved hangings of the tent bed. The door of the clothes-press stood a little open, and he could hear the sea between the cliffs.

He confronted the empty place. He must look at the carpet. Like the rest of the house, it was bound to be fairly shabby. There was a larger spare room on the floor above, that Anne might have had: they had discussed the point, before she came, decided that she would rather have someone else on the same floor with her. The upper rooms had never been in use since he could remember: they had few guests now. There was another story, garrets, the roof. He had a sudden strange and ghostly awareness of the men and women who had passed through the Tower, in the four centuries

of its existence. It was by reason of their ancient loves that he stood there with the candle in his hand, staring so into a room that smelt cold and musty. He turned too suddenly, and the light went out. A wild giddiness came on him: Anne, in the darkness. . . . The cold room jeered behind him, with mocking eyes. He had to force himself to a decent slowness until he saw the light in the drawing-room door.

CHAPTER XXIII

" Prodeas, nova nupta, si
iam videtur, et audias
nostra verba."

Carmen lxi.

A FEW days after that he brought Anne home. They spent the interval in Aberdeen : it had occurred to him, making his arrangements, that she was probably in need of clothes. He went shabby enough himself, and it did not worry him, but his shabbiness was always point-device, and anything less than that he felt discomfort. It gave him sufficient insight to understand, pondering carefully what Anne would need, how much of a woman's morale is in her wardrobe. She seemed to him always trim, but it struck him then that she had not seen a shop for many months. He remembered her, coming in from the staircase door, in a new white gown, the night of the ball in Stonehaven, and turning to let him see her finery. It was later on that night he had known he loved her : she had worn a red jewel of some kind at her breast. Here was something he could give her, at all events, and her visible relief when he spoke of the matter made him very glad that he had thought of it.

He had a queerly forlorn time, these four days. He took her to shops and stood sentry by her elbow while she chose stuffs, and hung about outside while she was fitted. She was serious and thoughtful over it all, and very tired when they reached the hotel again. It gave them both a good excuse to each other for dining in their solemn sitting-room.

On Saturday he drove with her to the station, along

the Docks, and put her into the train, a local one he often used on business. She sat beside him in her red furred cloak. The sharp cold of a January afternoon was excuse for her thick lace veil, but passing Portlethen she suddenly reached up and untied the ends, then folded the veil very carefully on her knee and put it into the little satchel she carried. Watching the lift of her head, to seaward of him, he knew very well exactly why she had done so.

He had ordered Todd to meet them, naturally. But he had not thought of specifying the vehicle: it had always been the dogcart that came for himself. Only, behind the railing, was not the dogcart, but the ancient barouche-landau, that had been his mother's in her brief married life. And the last time he had been in it himself was escorting Bertha on the night of the wreck. He had time to hope that Anne would not remember, nor the three of them, coming home from the Hospital Ball, a year ago. Then he saw that Todd was beaming, with a big white ribbon bow tied on his whip: and then, as he cleared the gate, discovered more. There were no horses on either side of the pole: instead, a dozen grinning youths had drag-ropes. He checked so suddenly that Anne, on his arm, was jolted against him; and then had to go on. He had forgotten established ritual. They had done as much when he brought Bertha home, and he remembered her clear high-pitched giggle, her entire delight in the customary compliment.

The lads raised a cheer as he came through the gate. He met friendly grins and touched his hat to them, and saw the colour run up in Anne's face. Her hand had gripped a little on his sleeve, but she bowed, smiling gallantly, to a fresh cheer. He got her to shelter,

thankful for the cold, that made it very plainly reasonable he should shake his head at Todd's low-voiced entreaty to allow him to open the top, let them see the lady.

He had to wait a moment by the step, to tip the porter who was bringing the luggage. There was a sizeable crowd about the place : the lads who had cheered, fishermen from the village, others he did not know, who might be from Muchalls, and any amount of women in shawls and mutches. Most of the faces wore broad friendly grins. Not all. There was a fringe outside the crowd who stared with an equal interest to the rest, and grinned too, but sidelong. One of them, as he waited, spat with a fine dexterity close beside him, and sang out with half-closed eyes, " The bride's awa' ! Hey, lads, gie's a' a keek at the bonny leddy ! "

The words were inoffensive enough, for certain : it was an occasion for some friendly licence. But Gilbert had a sudden biting impulse to smash his fist into the leering face. The cry exploded others. A woman's voice called out with a shrill giggle from the back, " Lat's see the bride, Kinnellan. Ye needna hide her." A handful of rice took him sharply in the face : he thought for a second that it had been gravel, and just in time saw the white stuff on his coat. There were other cries now, mostly, as he was aware, good-tempered enough, no more than the accepted friendly derision that has always been the traditional lot of the bridegroom. A big fat fish-wife, close to the carriage door, sang out cheerily, " Come awa' oot till we see ye, Leddy Kinnellan." She beamed like a harvest moon, immense and motherly.

Gilbert got up on the hub of a front wheel, that raised him above the crowd. The cries ceased at once. He

said, " My wife and I thank you all for a kindly welcome." It came to him, ghostly, he had said that before. He went on, " I am sorry we can't have the carriage open, but my wife has recently been gravely ill, and all of you know the Kinnellan road in winter is a trifle colder than the side of a fire."

There was a laugh at that. The enormous fishwife said wisely to her neighbour, " Peer lassie, she luiks nae weel." Another cheer, and he found that Anne was leaning from the door. She let them all see her, leaning forth in the opening, in her crimson cloak and little grey fur cap. Gilbert sprang down and stood guardian by the step, and another handful of rice spattered against him. Some of it caught Anne's face, making her wince. He raised his hat to the crowd, and got in beside her, slamming the door. They started with a jolt, the crowd streaming alongside for a little distance.

Anne fell back in her corner : he could feel her shivering, and pulling off his gloves took her hands to warm them, but they were not cold at all, and at that he took his own away at once, and stared out of the carriage window, saying nothing, his mouth hard set. It was six o'clock, and starlight. There were lads with torches at Kinnellan gate. The smoky wavering flames lit the arched masonry.

He handed Anne out, then turned and spoke to the crowd, Todd prompting him. Taggart was ready with due hospitality, in the harness-room. He would come and drink their health, but they must excuse " my wife " from doing so. She was not fit yet for very much excitement. A ribald jest caught his ear, from behind the torches : he controlled himself with an effort, recalling that Anne, if the words reached her at all,

would hardly comprehend a broad enough phrase, delivered in equally broad Kincardine Doric, and hoping the snigger that went with it missed her too. He handed her up the stone stair from the stables, and the torches unsteadied the normal ray of its lamp.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Earth to earth."

The Burial Office.

THERE were Taggart and the maids outside the door, and Rab, a dark blob of shadow hurled at his knees, panting with a pink tongue and approving whimper. Kinnellan, during the last day or two, had been no place for a dog who liked his comforts. Anne, smiling, was greeting the servants and shaking hands: big Katie was frankly weeping with excitement. Rab trotted up to her in courteous greeting, sniffed, halted, and suddenly pawed at her petticoats, with little noises of welcoming recollection.

They went upstairs to the lighted drawing-room. Anne stood by the hearth as he remembered her, but her red cloak seemed unfamiliarly bright. The last half-year was like a dream awakened from, but a wakening not at morning but in the dark. Its unreal world loomed to resume him again, as soon as this chink of reality should close. He heard his voice asking her if she were cold, telling her Katie would have her room all ready, and would she like her dinner sending up?

She said, "No, I'll come down, thank you. I am not tired." He could hear luggage being carried up the stair. She turned and went out of the room, by the staircase door, as he had seen her go a hundred times, and he went back again to the stable-yard.

Taggart and Todd and the cook were dealing refreshment to his late escort, with much broad Scots chaff. A row of farm lanterns made fantastic shadows. They

drank his health, with a cheer for " the bonny leddy." Anne's followed, and someone thrust a glass in his hand, and he had to reply in kind : they cheered him again. It was much what he had gone through once before, but on a summer evening with Bertha beside him, not in this odd fantastic glamour of shadows, smelling of frost and paraffin and whisky, above the familiar ammoniac of the stables. The sense of repetition and of strangeness made him feel half drunk. He heard his own voice speaking as if it had been that of another man.

After a little while he got away. The Tower, when he came up to the garden level, was lit oddly from beneath by the glow from the yard. The gulls flew into the light and out again, and a ray struck across the dark from the side of the Tower, high up on the second floor : that was Anne's window.

He went up and along the gallery to his room, and dressed for dinner with a growing sense that all his world would suddenly split about him and fall back from something quite unlike itself, that was the real thing he ought to consider. But the oak of the panels went on watching him : his glass reflected the shields along the chimney, the Douglas bleeding heart, the crowned Ogilvie lion, the Seton crescents, and the Stewart fess, all on shields of alliance bearing the Keiths' chief paly—the marriages of the first four lairds of Kinnellan. The last laird, looking both young and very tired, smoothed his hair, finished dressing, and put out his candles, and the bright shields relapsed into the darkness.

As he went through the gallery to the drawing-room he had to remind himself that Anne was there. She came in from the staircase door just as he entered, as he had seen her enter in the past, but unfamiliar, in a

coloured gown, of a dark clear amber, with a scarf of lace. It made her seem like a figure in masquerade, and the whole queer course of the day less real than ever. The gong that sounded below them at the moment disturbed his mind like a sudden noise in a play. As he followed Anne down the shadowy curve of the stair he could have sworn to the rustle of two silk dresses.

The dining-room faced him with more than he had foreseen. Taggart had made a gala show of plate, and there met him out of the gleam the smell of hyacinths. It swept him at once from the candlelight of the present to a room with blinds drawn on cold April sunshine, and Bertha laid out with a bible black under her chin : he flung up his head and checked, half opening his mouth to bid Taggart take the flowers away at once, and remembered in time that Anne might have no such memory. He moved to the table, faced her across the tall fountain of bright candles, loot of his grandfather's from the French sea-wars . . . and found another remembrance she must share. Since his father's death gave him the head of the table, Anne had always been accustomed to sit on his right : but she had had its end, in front of him, on the morning after the wreck, in Bertha's absence.

She took her place on the far side of the flowers, with the lights on her dark gold gown and piled shadowy hair. The garnet brooch he remembered was at her breast, and the deep red spark of it flickered unevenly. It stirred him to a sudden defiant anger. As the dark wine mounted to the rim of his glass he rose to his feet and lifted it over the flowers. " To you, Anne, and Kinnellan," he cried, and drained it, and flung the empty crystal to crash on the hearth.

The noise of its splintering seemed to break a spell. He sat down in his chair with a sense of release, and the strangest quality of the evening that followed, when he came to look back on it on his way to bed, was that so much of the strangeness had gone by. They talked across the flowers and to Taggart waiting with an astonishing lack of embarrassment: he could even, talking of Galt, speak of his father. And later, upstairs, it was not hard, after all, to bring out the cases from his jacket pocket. He had made his purchases when she made hers: the diamond crescent for her hair or bodice, the ring of big square stones that lay on green velvet, were extravagantly costly for his means, though he had not been sure if he could give them to her. But it was easier than he had thought. She did flinch as he laid the jewels in her lap, and he dared not put the ring on her hand himself, and noticed that though, having thanked him, she put it on, it was on her right hand, and not over her wedding-ring.

They were more constrained for a little after that: but the lamplight and fire and the wind outside the Tower and Anne's voice talking seemed to bring him home so much that he was surprised to find himself noting that she reached for a handscreen without needing to turn. There was always one on the little spindled table at that side of the hearth, by a box of carved sandal-wood and mother of pearl. When later he lighted her candle and his own he was quieter in spirit than he had been for long.

He closed the staircase door on her amber dress, and taking his own candle crossed to the other. The moonlight and the movement of the flame brought glints on the rack of arms in the gallery, and a stir into portraits here and there on the wall. Standing later between the

Flemish oak of the chimney and the Abbotsford Gothic of the enormous bed Captain Keith had thought suitable for the King's Chamber, his mind went after Anne, not as a lover's, but wondering if she found the return was hard. Only now the thing was level with them in time, and could be faced, it had grown easier.

He undressed, put the light out, and lay in half-moonlit darkness, with a strange deep friendly sense of Kinnellan about him, as a soldier on the eve of a notable action might feel his regiment. The cards were dealt now. He turned on his side in a while, stretched out a little, and slept like a boy, with a hand curved under his cheek.

CHAPTER XXV

"We've stookit the hairst, and we're needin'
Tae gether it in."

Bonnie Joann.

THE light from an open door beyond the curve struck downward on the smooth wall of the stair, picking out the small insets of granite where steps had been levelled. Taggart, descending in what for him was a hurry, nearly fell over her, recognised his mistress, and flattened himself to the newel to let her pass, with "Your luggage is up, mem, and Katie is in your room."

Anne drew the edge of her travelling cloak about her, and went up into light. Her room was glowing with candles: the press reflected the gleam of a brilliant fire, and she recognised the rose and blue of driftwood. Katie's starched streamers bent to the straps of her trunk. The stripped clean covers beneath the remembered glass held a frilled pincushion and a bowl of hyacinths, beneath the sconces with tall lighted candles.

Katie looked round as the straps gave. "Aye, mem, ye're hame. And—" she turned a rich apple-red—"we're a' richt pleased."

"Thank you," said Anne, and meant it. Her smile wavered, and the big lass was suddenly concerned. She pushed a chair forward.

"Ye'll be weariet, mem. Jist sit you down now." She unloosed Anne's cloak. "Sit in and warm yir feet efter the cauld, and give me yir keys, and I'll seen get yir things pit past."

Anne sat still as she worked. The warm room with

its fire, the sense of being sheltered and alone from the crowd, Katie's friendly purposeful bustle, steadied her. She had been nearly breaking as she came up, and the room gave her touch with her ancient world again, for all its plenitude of fire and light. Bertha's notions of comfort—Gilbert's, for that matter—did not include bedroom fires unless one was ill. The sound of a steady sea was below the cliff : she turned a little, towards the seaward window, and found her dressing-table equipped again, her brushes laid out in their accustomed order.

" Taggart wis sayin, mem, ye werena weel. I howp ye're some better ? "

" Yes, thank you. Oh, I am quite well again, really."

Katie shook her head, with an emphatic flap of a laced petticoat. " Ye're awfa white yet. But we'll seen sort that. Tina and me wis doon on the rocks the day, for carrageen, and Maggie's tae bile it tae ye. It's a fine jeely, and real strengthening. And the gweed sea air efter thae nesty towns 'll seen pit ye richt. Todd his yir saiddle polished, till ye cud near eese 't tae pit up yir hair."

Anne began to cry, suddenly and helplessly. The girl came and clapped her like a weeping bairn. " Hut tut, mem, ye mauna greet the nicht, and you a bride 'at's jist new hame wi' yir man. And nae sae muckle as in a strange-like dwallin', bit here at Kinnellan wi' fowk 'at kens ye weel. Look yir ain chalmer faur ye sleepit bonny ! We got the flooers tae ye a' the road fae Pegler's."

Anne, hunched in her chair, cried brokenly into her hands. She was still weak physically from her illness, and the warmth, the kindness, the sense of sudden unexpected safety, had loosened her will as no enmity

could have done. She tried hard for control, and managed to get out, " The flowers are beautiful. And I'm sure the—the jelly will be good for me. It was nice of you and Tina to go and get it." She sat up and dabbed her eyes. " I'll see Todd to-morrow. Is his little girl all right now ? "

" Aye, she's fine." Katie went back to the trunk and went on unpacking, sorting the things away in different drawers. Anne rose to her feet, took the pins from her little fur toque, and began to unbutton her bodice.

" I must dress. Leave out the amber silk. I'll put that on." It was the only one of her three new gowns that had been sent before she left Aberdeen, and Katie regarded it with admiration. She did not as a rule help the ladies to dress, but had hopes, to-night, of staying to hook up Miss Anne, since the occasion was far from ordinary.

Anne changed slowly : the business was a weary labour, and she dreaded having to face the house and Gilbert. She would have rouged a little if she could, but had none, and could only rub her cheeks to colour. The amber gown became her, at any rate : its ruffled square of bodice was kind to her thinness. She pinned on her mother's brooch of big oval garnets, shook out her festooned skirt over bronze beaded slippers, that had drawn a little squeal of joy from Katie, and looked at herself in the oval of the glass. She saw young Mrs. Keith of Kinnellan, not Anne Ogilvie, and it increased the strangeness : but the traces of her recent burst of tears had been successfully disguised, at least, and there was a certain sense as of protection in the ceremony of evening-dress again. In spite of her profound pre-occupations the little embroidered slippers were a

pleasure. But she leant hard on the rail on the way downstairs, and had to pause outside the drawing-room door.

The opening door was a plunge into the past: Gilbert, just coming in from the gallery, dressed for dinner, his dark face over the stiff white oblong of shirt. . . . The gong sounded: she almost asked "Is Bertha ready?"

The dining-room was half real and half a dream. Taggart, beside the sideboard, was real enough, but the table strange with unfamiliar silver. She realised, moving forward from Gilbert's side, that she would have to sit in Bertha's place, remembered then the morning after the wreck: there had been boiled eggs. . . . She sat down in her chair, and tried to unfold her napkin steadily, but everything seemed to be at strange distances.

Taggart moved behind her. Gilbert had taken his place. She fixed her eyes on the black bow of his tie, and the clutter of flowers and silver and lights and linen swam back into its proper three dimensions. She could *see* him again—saw him rising to drink to her, with a gesture that reminded her of his father. She took the gallantry of the broken glass in its own surface key, with her mother's smile: behind that something steadied at her heart. Gilbert was back in his own place, at Kinnellan. The gesture meant he accepted the terms of that. And he had coupled Kinnellan's name with hers. That moved her intensely, strengthening her spirit with a grateful pride. She touched her own glass to her lips, looking up at him, and felt the savour of the wine in her mouth as the completed rite of a sacrament, something that marked a choice not to be cancelled.

For the rest of the meal she had his lead to follow. The toast might look like a bridegroom's half-jesting compliment, might be a profounder thing than the form of their marriage: its immediate effect upon their evening was, oddly, to make him "Cousin Gilbert" again. The drawing-room might have been that of a year ago. Even the flash of his diamonds in her lap, though she winced at it and went whiter for a moment, did not disconcert her for more than a couple of breaths. She set the ring on the finger it seemed to fit, and it did not even occur to her to consider it might be the betrothal ring she had never had.

They talked on for a while, beside the fire, rather thinking aloud habitual but not very personal thoughts, in the certainty of immediate comprehension, than discussing affairs, still less making conversation. She felt his normal mind touch her own easily, with a faint and fleeting surprise to find it so, and was simply content, leaving most of the talk to him, and idly screening her face from the glowing fire.

It was very much the old Gilbert who said at last, as the clock gave out a little bright stream of sound, "That's ten, Anne, and you'll be tired. You'd best go to bed. I'll tell them to send up your breakfast, shall I?"

The day rushed back on her then: the familiar surface broke like a half-healed wound under a blow. This good quiet talk was done: they could not resume it. She said, "Yes, I am tired. But I'll be down to breakfast. I'm not an invalid really, now, you know."

There were two candles instead of three by the door. She knew, so exactly, just how he struck the match, how his brown hand brought the flame of it to the wick,

the slant of the narrow strip of glazed white linen between it and the dull black of his sleeve.

"Sleep well, my dear." His eyes were kind and friendly. He gave her the lighted candle and opened the door, and she gathered her skirts and went past him up the staircase, her light picking out the mortar of the stones.

CHAPTER XXVI

"Where got ye that bonny bonny bride?"
The Braes of Yarrow.

Mrs. Reid, as her cards informed her acquaintances, was At Home on the first and third Wednesdays of the month: and this being three o'clock on the third in January, the tea-table and a due array of delicacies awaited guests in the corner of her drawing-room, and Mrs. Reid, in her best black satin dress—the one with a plastron of thick jet embroidery—her second-best earrings and her cameo brooch, was elegantly occupied with crochet, with one ear cocked for the sound of the front door bell.

Outside was a blustering day, with snow on the ground, and a good deal more in the heavy clouds to northward. The drawing-room fire was the first there had been for a fortnight, and the lady tucked a shawl about her shoulders: it would be easy, at the first ring of the bell, to stow it behind the big frilled pink silk cushion that was the major glory of the sofa. She debated whether anyone would come: the snow was certainly bad for a body's best shoes, but old Miss Elphinstone rarely missed an At Home Day, Mrs. Dishart owed her a call, and Mrs. Fraser. Her spice scones and the delicate fingers of shortbread were unlikely to be wasted.

They were not. Before the china clock with the three cupids had rung the half hour, the room fluttered with Sabbath bonnets. Snow or fair sky, there was far too much to discuss for anything less than a complete

sederunt of all the elder ladies of Stonehaven who were accustomed to call on Mrs. Reid. The clash went like a mill with the lade in spate.

" I assure you, I expected it all along "

" But so soon—his poor wife has not been dead a year."

" Just over nine months, Mrs. Dishart. It was early April when she received her call. I know, because Maggie had her third that week."

" Indeed, so it is. I must say it's little enough."

" One could hardly expect a real regard for propriety in a Papist and a Frenchwoman. Still, Mr. Keith—I would have looked for more from him, I admit."

" I beg your pardon, Miss Elphinstone." This was the hostess. " It was only Miss Ogilvie's mother that was French. She told me herself her father was from Alyth."

" All the same, we can't deny that she's a Papist ! "

" I'm afraid that's true. But the poor lassie is hardly to blame for it. She was brought up by her mother's people in France—her father was a doctor in practice there. She hasn't had our advantages, you see. Indeed, I believe she was brought up by *nuns !* "

" And her father a Scotsman ! It's an awful thought."

" Perhaps he was a Papist too. There's quite a lot of them, even in this country. They even say—— "

" Providence has permitted their existence, no doubt to let us take example by their sins. But it's a sad-like thing to see one of them being married on the laird of a decent estate, before anyone else could allow herself to think that he would soon be eligible again. It's not a thing any *nice* girl would have done."

" No indeed. I was saying as much to Joann this morning."

" It's queer there should be nothing in the papers."

" Is that a fact, now ? I saw there was no announcement in the *Journal*, and I couldn't believe that a Conservative would only have sent it in to the *Free Press*. But I thought he maybe just had it in the *Scotsman*. They're terribly expensive, these notices. Just daylight robbery."

" Not a word, I assure you ! I went through the back numbers till the first of November. And there was nothing in the *Journal* either ? He's surely not ashamed of her, tee-hee ! "

" Well, they say it's true she hasn't got a penny."

" Is that a fact ? She was out on the Sabbath, then, for I saw her myself—I was confined to the house with an indigestion—in a fine crimson cloak with a fur lining —a new shape with the fullness in organ pleats and a collar *à la cosaque* and a toque to match. If you can take that for a specimen of her trousseau—— "

" Will you take a piece of shortbread, Mrs. Dishart ? "

" Well, a man that's fool enough to marry a girl that hasn't got a penny, and French at that—— "

" Miss Ogilvie has a competence, I believe." This was Mrs. Reid again, from over the tea-pot. " Not very much, but enough to keep her genteelly."

" Genteelly—you may say it, and not be wrong ! Flaunting her crimson and fur in Stonehaven High Street, and the first Mrs. Keith hardly cold yet in her grave. And a queer enough story, if all's true that one hears."

" Is your cup out yet, Mrs. Fraser ? You'll take a shortbread ? She always had quite the French taste in her clothes. When I called on her, as I did on Tuesday week—she's quite a friend of ours, dear lassie, you know—she was wearing a most elegant new dress, a fine

cashmere in a new shade, sort of brown, with an inclination in it to terra cotta—a draped plastron of silk edged round with passementerie in a kind of bronze, with a wee sort of ruche of ivory lace at the collar—just a quilling over the edge, above a cord."

"I like those wee ruches. They're awful softening."

"It's a pity she's dark. I've seen her in real nice dresses. I don't suppose the wave in her hair's her own, but she does it real well, though I think she would suit a fringe."

"It certainly might make her look less skinny. She has a wee waist—I suppose it's her French stays. But her bust is just nowhere—no sort of figure at all." Mrs. Murtle Smith preened her ample charms a little.

A giggle. "He's certainly made a change this time!"

"That was a queer affair, about his wife."

"Yes indeed was it. My Bella was telling me—her cousin is the Fiscal's housekeeper—he was as near as you like being tried for homicide."

"Is that a fact, now? I heard there was word of it."

"I was told a queer-like story about the thing—that they quarrelled over that flaunting madam from Glasgow that used to be the schoolmistress at Skares."

"Indeed, now? Bella told me it was her that carried a tale of the business to the police."

"She got little by that, then! After the Fiscal took her precognition she up and packed her box and went off home. Ebenezer said she wrote the Board she was sick, but there was no word of it till she saw the Fiscal."

"Sick, indeed! I wouldn't like to mention the kind of sickness! Her hats, I assure you—if I've said once to James, I've said twenty times she was just a public danger to the parish. It's a mercy Mr. Keith didn't marry *her*."

"You're not suggesting that he was responsible? Dear me, I always thought he was that quiet!"

"It's the quiet men that are often the worst, Mrs. Fraser. And that flaunting besom, with her airs and her ribbons——"

"Indeed, you may say it! She had a hat last summer—— And I'm hearing that it's not the only story."

"Is that a fact, now?"

"Well, I couldn't say for certain there's anything in it. You would never say I was one to notice gossip. But there was talk of a carry-on with Miss Ogilvie, before his wife went cannily out of the road."

"Isn't that awful, now! You would hardly believe it. To be sure, I used to see them out riding together, as bold as you please."

"You're eating nothing, Miss Elphinstone. Try the ginger-cake."

"Thank you. Your recipe's an awful nice one. You were saying, Mrs. Fraser——?"

"Oh, just that she was very fond of riding about with her cousin, at any rate the while after she came here. There's maybe no harm in it—I never was one to be censorious. But I wondered whiles that Mrs. Keith would allow it."

"She always had a great notion of Miss Ogilvie. I remember once she showed me a bonnet she altered, and it certainly set her better for the change."

"Is it true that Miss Ogilvie had to see the Fiscal?"

"She was a witness when Mrs. Keith was killed."

"What an awful-like thing! You would think it would be a warning."

"It doesn't appear to have given her much sorrow!"

"If Mr. Keith had a notion of her before——"

"My goodness, you don't mean to say there was anything in it?"

"The story about his having killed his wife? I wouldn't like to say there was any truth. But it was all over the countryside last spring that—of course he mightn't be *responsible*."

"You mean he was——? I never knew he *drank*."

"I never *heard* that he did, but that's not the story."

"You mean the Duncan girl——?"

"Well, so I've heard. But you know what folks will say."

"Is that a fact, now? It's a queer thing then that he would marry his cousin."

"Indeed it is—a plain wee thing like that. Mrs. Thomson, Carsephairn, was telling me last Sacrament—she just stood in for a cup of tea in her hand——"

"There's some tale that it wasn't Isa Duncan at all. Is it true, Mrs. Reid, Miss Ogilvie ran from the place?"

"I couldn't say what you would call running, Miss Elphinstone. It was her that got the doctor, or so I've heard. She stayed with us for a while after the death, seeing it wasn't a nice-like thing for a young lassie to stay there any more without a chaperon—Mr. Keith was no relation of hers, you know. She went away then to friends in Edinburgh—I'll be frank with you and tell you it was a *convent!*"

"Mercy!"

"My goodness!"

"Losh me!"

"Is that a fact?"

"I've a notion of my own about the wedding—that he doubted those nasty priests would get hold of her—not but what Father Cameron's a real nice body—and shut her up in one of those horrible places. So he

married the bairn to get her out of their hands. She's just of age, you see. I know that from James."

"Is that a fact?"

"Indeed, that's possible. Those Roman Catholics 'll do *anything*. I once saw a book about convents—it was just awful. You simply wouldn't believe the things if I told you."

"Still, it's a queer-like affair about Mrs. Keith. It might have been just an accident, of course."

"I doubt he never thought much of Miss Duncan I saw them the very day before it happened, the Sabbath, after the morning diet of worship. She was putting herself in his way as bold as brass, and he never let on he saw the quyne, tee-hee! Her face was as red as the cherries in her hat."

"Maybe. A man's been known before to weary. But if it wasn't Isa Duncan, now, there maybe was a reason nearer home."

"Losh, there's a landau coming up the road—at the gate, I declare, and a lady getting out. Bother the snow, I can't get a sight of her face."

There was a lull in the chatter for a moment. Then the door of the drawing-room opened as far as it could, and the maid's voice, a little excited, announced "Mrs. Keith." Anne had her duty to do by her bridal callers.

CHAPTER XXVII

" In various talk th' instructive hours they passed."
The Rape of the Lock.

" YE'LL hae anither, Jock ? "

" Aweel, I'm needin' hame. But sin' ye're sae pressin'—— "

" Twa schooners, Sandy, wi' a wee chaser each. Aye, it's a queerlike business."

" Ye war sayin' ? "

" Dod, man—— Aye, Geordie, that's yirsel. It's a coorse nicht."

" Aye, aye. The auld kirk, Sandy. It's byous drifty, and near haun' as black 's the Earl o' Hell's breeks."

" Here's luck tae the waddin', onygate, an' rowth o' bairns."

" Ca' ower the fire, Geordie—ech, min' yir haund ! Losh, whatten a draught—Aye, man, Todd, ye're a stranger."

" Aye, aye, lads. Foo's yirsel, Sandy ? "

" Fit'll ye tak ? "

" Hae ye the time ?—ou aye, it's nae hauf six. I wis some dootin' 'at ma watch wis fast. Kinnellan's nae needin' me till hauf an oor yet, and I needna yoke a whilie. I'll tak a schooner."

" Come awa ben tae the fire, and gie's a news. I'm hearin' ye've an awfa steer at Kinnellan—a triumphal erch, nae less, and a torchlicht procession, as braw's the students' yin at a Rectorial."

" Na, na. Ye're misinformed. There wisna an

erch. The lads wis up tae the station tae walcome the bride, and what for no ? She's a bonny wee bit quynie."

" Jamie Traill wis tellin' me they hid oot the horses."

" Aye, they took doun the landau tae the Toor."

" Hech, hech ! They'd be a bonny-like yoke in a ploo ! I mind they did that for the ither Mistress Keith, her 'at's awa'. It's aye gweed tae be ceevil, as the wifie said fin she bobbit tae the Deil."

" He's seen weariet o' the gweed estate o' a weedower."

" Next to nae wife, a gweed ane's best. Miss Anne 'at was, wis real weel likit, ye ken, by them 'at kent her. She wisna yin tae crack wi' a' an' sindry, but real pleisant-spoken fin she hid occasion. She hid nice-like mainners, and she didna forget tae cairry them aboot."

" She's nae sae bonny as her preedecessor. A sonsy oxter*-fu' o' a wumman, yon, gin she lackit gentrice."

" Aye was she, bit I aye likit them black."

" Aweel, ye're suited gin ye prefer the dark yins. . . . Aye, Jamie, lad, come awa ben tae the deese,† and dinna cowp ma gless, ye muckle nowt ! Here's Dauvie Todd fae Kinnellan—ye ken Bellakie's Jamie, div ye nae ? Hae anither a' roun', lads, and drink tae the bonny black bridie. Clean cawp oot ! "

" Fitten a bride ? Fa's merriet, the muckle gowk ? Ne'er seek a wife till ye ken fit tae dee wi' her ! "

" Aye, weel, the lad 'at walit her s'd ken ! It's nae a twalmonth yet sin' he berriet his first."

" Nae a twalmonth—is't Kinnellan ? . . . Aye, thank ye kin'ly. Lang may yir lum reek, Geordie. The neist yin's mine. Aye, Kinnellan. . . . An' the ither lassie's hame ? "

" Fitten a lassie ? " Todd stopped filling his pipe.

* The crook of an arm. † Long seat by the fire.

"Jist the braw bride—fit ither? Ye're sayin' she's dark. Aye, he his luck wi' them dark, gin a' tales is true."

"Gin a' tales is true, then yon ane's nae a lee. Hae ye a spunk, Geordie? My boxie's oot."

"Hae." The red match-box flew across the hearth.

The newcomer stretched his legs. "Atweel, I hae twa gweed luggies* like ither fowk. And we a' ken fine aboot yon quynie Duncan. He had luck yon time—she wis a richt tasty piece, and near oot o' the body aboot him, gin a's true."

"Mebbe that. She didna get muckle oot o't, onygate."

"Like eneuch. Gin a's true, the get wis maybe ither."

Todd grunted. Another voice took up the tale.

"He wis gey seen aff wi' her, then."

"Ach, what for no? Bonny, bit brunstane. It wis hersel 'at turned the place tapsalteerie, awa tae the police wi' a tale o' murder, nae less. Weelawat Cherlie Loutit wis blythe tae hear it!"

"Muckle he got, then! The maister near thrawed his craig."

"Aye, yon wis a queer-like business, richt eneuch. Him up afore the Shirra in the morning, and his wife nae streikit. I'm neen the lad tae think ower weel o' Loutit—a muckle gutsy hash o' an Embro' man. He can cool in the skin he het in, for a' I'm carin'. But the gentrice disna cowp a bobby for naething, bena they're drunk. And Kinnellan's a sober man by a' accoonts."

"Aye, it's a queer-like affair. I d'na ken the richts o't, bit I some doot the maister wadna be himsel. He

* Ears.

wis aye a gweed man tae the maistress—we a' kent that. And Cherlie Loutit his a clairty tongue."

"He has that. Bit nae invention. He's a peer sweerer. I heard him Tuesday past fin his gig near cowpit, joukin'* a laddie wi' a calf in a stringie. He couldna keep it up. It was jist monotonous."

"He hisna Scots. Ye canna sweer richtly in English —jist a wheen fushionless damns."

"Aye, there's sma' satisfaction. Bit it wisna the will he lackit, weelawat! Is't true he his a pick against Kinnellan?"

"I d'na ken. The maister's a dour yin fin he's angert."

"Gin a' tales is true, he hid maybe occasion yon time! It's aye the man 'at his the riven breeks 'at's sunest oot o' his chair wi' least tae stert him."

Todd put his hands on his knees, and looked at the speaker.

"Aye?" said he. "Ye war wishfu' tae imply——?"

"Imply on my thoomb. We a' ken fine yon black-avised bick Isa Duncan isna the only petticoat in the ballant."

"Aye?" said Todd softly, and went on with the staring.

"The Ogilvie lass his a richt braw seat in the saiddle. And maybe it's nae the hale she kens aboot ridin'."

Todd rose, very quietly. "Yon's a bluidy lee Jamie, my bonny man, gin that's hoo ye're callit, ye'll e'en say as muckle gin ye're bidin' here."

Jamie's long limbs stretched easily out from the deese. "Fegs, the wee cockie's croose! And fa'll pit me oot?"

"Ony decent lad 'at his lugs and honest mainners."

"Michty, lads, fit's adee? Can ye no gree quiet?"

* Dodging.

"Jist bide you, Sandy." Todd waved the host aside. "This is nae your consairn. Div ye say ye're a leear?"

"Deil a say o' me."

"Jist tak you that, then!" Sandy grabbed as his fist shot out, and spoilt the blow.

Jamie leant back. "Aye, the wee man's seekin' hurt. Rin for yir fuppie,* ye ablach, and mebbe ye'll reach."

Sandy's large person still stood in between them "Hut-tut, hut-tut, fitten a collieshangie! Fit's gart ye tak the bung? Can ye nae gree quiet?"

"Oot o' ma road, Sandy. This is nae your consairn. I'm sweir tae spile a freendly sederunt wi' fechtin', bit there's fyles it's needit. Ye lang leein' menseless canalyie, tak aff yir jaicket."

"Michty, lads, fitten a logomachy! Todd, I'm richt sweir tae be sair on an aul' freen! . . . Jamie, bide you faur ye are till I get the richts o't . . ."

"Richts here, richts there . . ."

"Ach, Todd, man, haud yir haun'——" But his grab and Jamie's parry were both too slow. Todd got home a resounding skelp as final challenge, and the lamp swung to the dirl as Jamie rushed him. The others stood clear. The general sense of the meeting was with Todd, for Gilbert, though hardly popular, was well thought of, and Todd, as his man, had a right, if not a duty, to stand up for anything that touched Kinnellan. Their interest in Jamie's last insinuation was mainly academic, on the whole. Mrs. Keith was a stranger, her morals her husband's concern. And Bellakie's Jamie was known for bawdy gossip. They stood clear of the fight as it raged across the hearth, with small science but considerable smeddum, and looked on with dispassionate

* Whip.

interest, all but Sandy, who was shoving his glassware to the back of the bar, and emitting sounds like an excited hen. Todd fought dourly silent: his foe had the advantage by a couple of stone and half a head of height, but his birse was up, and he tackled him like a terrier. Jamie swore steadily, with a dirty tongue: the little man's footwork was a good deal the better. It was some minutes before he got home a blow that sent Todd with a crash to the flower-pots in the window. The lamp flickered in the draught from the broken glass. Todd picked himself up, shedding earth and shards of delf, and squared again. A heavy tread reached the door, and a deep magisterial voice said grimly, "Haud!"

Todd launched his counter-spring, but the others turned, to a large blue presence with bright silver buttons. Sergeant Scruton advanced to the fight with a ponderous briskness.

"Haud, lads! Hey, you there, Sandy, fit's adee?"

There was a prompt and very substantial silence. A voice broke it from the door. "There you are, Sandy. Where's that trap of mine? . . . Hallo, Sergeant, how are you? What's the matter here?" Gilbert Keith came clear of the wooden screen by the door, found a small man with a violently bleeding nose in the Sergeant's grip, and recognised his coachman.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"The stars be hid that led me to this pain."
Tottel's Miscellany.

THE snow lay heavily till after Candlemas, with a dour frost to bind it in sharp-cut wreaths, and under the smouldering skies of the long forenights the ice on the little loch by Kinnellan Mains rang with the curling-stones and the swish of the besoms.

Gilbert came down at times, as he had been wont. The minister was the skip of his usual rink, and he was unhappily self-conscious with him: Dr. Dishart had wished him joy of his new marriage, but not heartily, and he could not be very sure if the reason for that was more than that Anne was a Catholic. But in a roaring match between rival parishes there is very little room for self-consciousness: it was the minister's hand that thumped his shoulder when his last shot drove out an enemy guard . . . then the old man was off along the loch-side, his silver beard and shepherd's tartan muffler flying as he yelled to Mains to "Soop her, soop her!"

The match did him good, however. Its good-fellowship, then and after, when they duly gave supper to their late opponents, who had beaten them by a hairs-breadth, warmed him somewhat, made it easier for him to accept himself again. Then the frost gave suddenly: a single night left the whole countryside clamorous with water, and the back-end of the winter was on them at once, with thaw and windy rain and the roads splashing, and pale sun that began to set further from south. It was well up now from the sea when he rose in a morning,

and the ploughs had begun in the fields, with the gulls screaming over.

He was busy, of course, coming in soaked of a night, and soundly tired. But he was not, for most of the time, unhappy. The accustomed battle for crops had begun again : he had less time to think about personal things, beyond the pleasantness of dry clothes and dinner, and his own chair by the fire, with Anne at her sewing. She seemed better in health, though she was very silent : but she had always been that, and the enforced confinement of the snow, of the heavy roads after the thaw, was perhaps as well. It gave gossip time to die down before she met it.

He had not forgotten the odd affair of Todd, a decent respectable father of a family, " drunk and disorderly " for the first time in his life. He had bailed him out and rated him well on the road, and Todd had no defence but " I wisna drunk, sir." There was nothing more to be gathered : but Gilbert, somehow, had felt it incumbent on him to pay his fine, though he could not have given any reason for doing it. He had not gone to the Sheriff-court, of course, but had occasion to go to the Court-house that morning, and had walked into Todd's antagonist coming out. The man sniggered and spat as he passed, and his fingers crisped. He wondered vainly again what had caused the quarrel, if Anne's name had been in it : Todd was a loyal soul. For his sins he had then an encounter with Captain Loutit, over strayed sheep, and though Loutit was fairly civil, he smiled a good deal more than the business called for.

The worst of all had been meeting Archie Hailes. They were both on horseback, on a country road, and the boy, to his astonishment, had reined in : they had stood there, stirrup to stirrup, in the dusk, and Archie

let fly, too moved to know or care that he was talking like a melodrama. Gilbert sat still, his horse's shifting head the only thing moving about him, and heard him out. His silence flattened the other's passionate phrases. Archie flogged an anger that had grown queerly empty : he had expected Keith's switch to be up by this. All he got at last was what he least expected.

" You damned young fool, do you think I don't know it all ? " and Gilbert shook rein and went on with his road home, at his former steady trot, without looking aside. It would have astonished Archie even more if he had known he was shaking as if he had ague.

Yet he grew dourly accustomed to such chance, went steadily on with his work, not uncontent. He could talk about that to Anne, and did so eagerly. She showed a keen interest in the details of it, asked questions about what she could not understand : she could even—and this surprised him a good deal—understand the estate's accounts when he showed her them. She had a Frenchwoman's grasp of practical details, and very soon he found their old friendly relation developed a broader basis of shared concerns.

It rather needed it, too. The old externals were difficult now, if not impossible. There were books, of course : she had found *The Kingis Quhair*, and its Middle Scots gave her rather difficult going. She did not sing now, and he could not ask her. They played chess at times : she had often played with his father, but seldom with himself. She went back to her lace-pillow. But he realised, uneasily, at times, that he knew little of how she spent her days, of what went on in her mind while the bobbins clickered.

He had shelved the problem of personal relations. It

worried him little, indeed, when they were together, and most of the rest of the time he was fairly busy. Only at night, when she had gone upstairs, it roused in his mind as a thing that would have to be dealt with. He had slept better for the outdoor work, but by now his sleep began to twist with dreams, fantastic and sometimes ugly, or touched with lust. Anne played no part in them. If the woman concerned had a definite identity, she might be Isa Duncan, or once, Queen Mary, in a white gown with red jewels at her breast. His waking self disliked them heartily, forgetting them at once, with a sense of relief.

One night when the wind had gone south, with small spring rain, he woke with a sense of Anne just out of reach, and a whelming desire for her flooding in soul and body. He stumbled to his feet, indeed, in the darkness, and so woke fully, to the sound of the sea, and the knowledge of what it was he had risen to seek, and checked, standing there till the night had cooled his fever, and he sought back to warmth between sheets grown cold.

He could not sleep again for a long time. Anne and he were no longer cousins by courtesy, but man and wife. What was more, they loved each other. There was no conceivable reason to be found why Anne, who now was mistress of Kinnellan in Bertha's place, gave orders to Bertha's servants, should not be his wife in every other sense. It was obvious he would have to have an heir. Old thrust-back images drummed beneath his mind: two small white breasts that were pointed and thrust apart, the delicate rose that crowned them . . he turned sick. To make love to Anne, now, was utterly out of the question. A ghost of her hair lay insistently on his mouth: he could not recall having ever touched her lips, though there was no doubt

that he must have done so—then. But the cool scent of her hair, wet with the rain, hung just out of reach of his senses, and tortured them.

The desire flooded up again, coloured dark with anger. It was nearly hate, for both of them, for a time. He gripped at his self-control, tried to think coolly. He had shelved the facing of this for over a month: it would have to be settled some time, and that soon.

He knew very well that Anne would not refuse him. She was his wife . . . and the last thing he recalled, before the madness had swept over him in that vile recollection on the cliffs, was her eyes, tormented with pity. That had betrayed her: and he had gone mad and accepted the betrayal. She would pity again, if he were to demand it . . . and he knew, and refused to let himself acknowledge, that once through her guard he could make her feel more than pity, kindle remembered fire. The thought would not go.

It would be easy enough. She might want it, even. There was no earthly reason for holding back. There was every reason for not doing so. Anne had never seemed to have any shrinking from him: she had welcomed his arms about her in her illness. Being a countryman who had always been accustomed to accept the physical terms of life in action, hunger and sex and fatigue and growth and weather, at work in man and directed by him in turn, he lacked the townsman's alarmed sentimentality, including the notion current in his day, that women were incapable of desire. His creed on that point was simple and unreflecting: the good ones controlled it more easily than men, the bad did not, and that was all there was to it. He might, perhaps, be doing Anne injustice. . . . The thought of her warm and surrendered against his body roused a crazy sense of

revolt. It was out of the question. There was every reason : but he could not do it.

The decision was so clinching, and so crazy, that his impulses beat at the prohibition as if it had been forced by circumstance. He had nothing to do in the world to settle the question but cross the gallery and climb the stair. Anne, if she really would have willed a refusal . . . he had surely the decency to let her be. His head was steady now . . . and his heart like a stone.

He flung himself angrily on to his other side, and thumped his pillow. Go up and settle it now. If Anne refused him, then the thing was clear. If she did not . . . he groaned, and thrust away the sheet : the soft fall of a fold of it felt too like her hair. One could not : besides, he would frighten her, very likely. He owed her some kind of a courtship, in decency. He remembered evenings in Mrs. Hadden's drawing-room, on a spindly sofa, with Bertha at his side.

That was too much : he got up and paced the room barefoot, till he struck his elbow hard on the foot of the bed. It seemed to restore him to some sort of rationality. He lit a candle, filled and lit a pipe, and got *Don Quixote* from the dressing-room.

CHAPTER XXIX

" In jeopardy
Of blank amazements."
Endymion.

He spent most of the next day in Aberdeen. The fine substantial granite, new washed with rain and pearly in spring sun, the broad pleasant streets, the familiar traffic, were somehow reassuring. There were snowdrops in the garden by Union Terrace, and one bold crocus, bright among dark green blades, that soon would display the city's coat of arms for the pleasure of the Braif Toun of Bon-Accord. Wallace in bronze waved a twelve-inch defiant hand at the Theatre and the Public Library, and a student gown or two showed gaily scarlet.

He carried out the affairs of his day's business, with banker, tailor, saddler, bookseller, seedsman—the last two always gave him a good deal of pleasure—came home rather late, but not intentionally, and slept better than he had done for several nights. Most of the next day kept him in the business-room, or in the end of a loft above the stable, where he had made a sort of laboratory. The chemical side of farming had always taken him. His experimental work with fertilisers began nowadays to demand a larger scope : his tenant at the farm of Burn of Nessie was a wise and careful scientific farmer who had taken a deal of interest in the matter, and whose practical knowledge, in the early days, had spared him some unprofitable attempt.

He decided to walk over and see him now, and after a crack and a cup of tea " in his hand " on the long deese

beside the kitchen fire, came back, with Rab at his heels, through the end of the dusk. The land was dark, and a star or two out to seaward : but inland bare branching trees, with life in them, were traceried across a clear green sky, that held a young crescent moon and one white planet. A small stream brattled beside him, invisible : there was a scent of water and loosened earth, and the last of a long snow-wreath under a dyke. He had a queer sense of expectancy, of restlessness that was painful, yet contented.

Anne at dinner looked somehow different from her usual. He discovered that it had to do with her hair, and then that she wore a high Spanish comb of dark shell, like a crown. It suited her, and he told her so. She explained that it had belonged to her mother in Lima. " There is another one—oh, twice as big, and carved like lace. That was for *las fiestas*. They're funny old-fashioned things, but they're rather pretty. I found it to-day and thought I would put it on. I used to dress up with them when I was little." It was at this point that both of them thought of Peru. Anne coloured : she had found the comb by chance, and all its associations were with her childhood, stories at bed-time, make-believe from *Cendrillon*. She had put it on for a whim of phantasy, and now she wished very heartily she had not. It was an inexcusable little blunder.

Gilbert, however, seemed untroubled by it. Quite visibly, he thought that it became her, and she was pleased again, like a child who is praised. Indeed, the memory of Peru it brought him was also rather a matter of ancient stories, that blended into memories of the ballads, Oroyo and Cuzco tangled with Kinmont Willie, street fighting in Lima with raids across the Sark. The memories fused with that of the green sky, and the

crescent over ploughed earth: it was spring in Scotland, the spring work at Kinnellan had begun. He ate and drank in his own house, and was content.

After dinner he sat with an open book on his knee, but his gaze idled over the fire and Anne. She leant a little forward over her work, the train of her yellow gown swept round her foot, and one bronze beaded slipper showed a little. The comb made a gracious line with her piled hair and the delicate line of her neck between ear and shoulder.

The fire was warm, and the pleasant even lamplight filled the room quietly: he could hear the sea, a young flood making by the sound of it, and recalled again the trees and the one great star, high in bare branches. All the house was still.

The lamplight changed a little on Anne's gown, and she began to sing softly to herself, her hands still moving gently about her work. The sound was a mere croon, with no words to it, hardly more than the whisper of the driftwood fire—an old Scots air, very slow, and full of longing. Her gaze abandoned her work and went beyond him, as if her thoughts were far from the song or her needle, or even themselves in the steady peace of the lamplight. A memory of the words to the slow air rose distantly to his mind, through the lingering sound:

Simmer's a pleisant time,
Flowers o' every colour. . . .

and then the patient longing of the refrain, of the wakeful lover, wearied beyond all hope, yet

Fain wad I rise and rin,
If I thocht I wad meet my dearie.

It was on his tongue to put the question to her, did she know what she sang? But her eyes were unaware, and the quietness forbade him speech.

The slow air went on, its lift and fall and pause deepening the silence. He had risen now, as the cadence of the refrain came to an end. Anne looked up slowly, and he knelt by her, drew forward, and found her. They were still awhile, their limbs forgotten in odd uncompleted postures. He drank a profound contentment, out of time.

He had the dark soft hair against his palm : a fragrance weighed on his eyes. He said " Anne," and waited. The word filled the space about them like a silence, and through it her eyes came up to him again, tranquil and deep, and he sought into them, as a swimmer goes down through very deep clear water. She smiled, and he moved strongly to find her mouth.

A crash beside them. He turned, and what he saw drove up at him as the earth drives up at a man who falls in full consciousness from a high tower. The lid of a sandalwood box, and splashes of brightness. The little table by Anne had fallen over.

They were stiff and cold to the contact of each other before they consciously knew that Bertha's silks were scattered in coloured skeins upon the hearth, or clinging to the folds of Anne's purfled dress. Both of them, many a night, had held them for winding. The clear flat high-pitched voice, the kind simple smile, would be there in the lamplight if they were to turn.

They stayed rigid, Anne still between his arm and breast, her fingers on his sleeve with the rings gleaming. Then he rose stiffly. She heard him go down the stair. A cold draught blew in, and the closing of a door. She sat where she was, the bright silks still caught in her dress. They were clinging to it still when she went upstairs, leaving the lamp to burn out, and a blackened fire.

CHAPTER XXX

"What I have done through lack of wit,
I never, never can recall."
Goodnight and joy be with you.

GILBERT was out when she got down in the morning—was fishing the Etlin burn, with his lunch in his creel. If he got home before dinner, she did not see him. They ate and drank and were waited on by Taggart. He had one small grilse for a day of rain and sleet, looked tired and dragged. Anne put a few courteous questions, as if he had been a guest, and he answered them. Nothing mattered very much, but they might as well talk. He let her go up to the drawing-room alone, sat and stared at the glint of light on a decanter till his coffee was cold, his cigar gone out on his plate. When he recollected himself and went upstairs she had gone, and Katie brought a message to him. The mistress had a headache, had gone to bed.

In fact, the headache was more than a mere excuse. She had lain with a leaden wakefulness most of the night, had spent the day in a kind of grey half-dream, watching the sleet on the window, the shift of the fire, had muddled her orders for dinner, and sought at last the shelter of her own room, away from the house.

It was shelter of sorts: she returned to it now again. But it failed her. Its familiar contents stared: the lofty damask curve of the bed-canopy regarded her with an air of grim indifference. She knelt by it, facing the crucifix hung in the tent, and tried to pray, but gave it

up in a while : she could not make the words mean anything, nor direct her will. She wondered where Gilbert was, and had a sense of him alone and cold . . . but she had mended the fire very carefully before she came up. It could not have burnt down yet.

She tried to keep away the thought of him, of the house that was his. This room at least was her own. If she muddled her own concerns, it would not matter. She had got confused in British weights and measures, writing a tradesman's list that afternoon, and now it worried her out of all proportion. She was finding it rather difficult, in fact, to cope with some of her new responsibilities. Her training had been thorough, but it was French. She could have adapted it more easily to a new Scots household, but one that was running already—one also whose customary course she knew—set her to desperate comparisons. She felt she owed what success she had achieved—Gilbert, indeed, had never noticed a difference—to the fact that her maids had already been trained by Bertha. They served herself more willingly, to be sure : Bertha's manner with servants had not been fortunate. But it was mainly thanks to Bertha's training that they were able to do so as well as they did, and she despised herself for resenting the fact.

Resentment, though, was the least of what it brought her. She kept the household keys that had been Bertha's, took her place at table, even her very name. It was coming to be more than she could bear. That she felt Kinnellan more itself without Bertha—and she was beginning to know that she had done so—seemed a final treachery, worse than all the rest, precisely because not wholly unjustified. She could have forgiven herself more easily if she had not known she was fitter for its

mistress, understood it and Gilbert's interrelation with it as the other woman never could have done.

She got up from her knees and stood there, utterly lonely. That for days at a time she had been not unhappy, that the evening before she had been well content, and for some time profoundly more than that, now crowned the bleak horror that confronted her. Her breasts began to ache for his touch to return, but she could not bear to let her mind go near him, and stayed enclosed in her own pain for a while. That grew unbearable. She had no pride left to help her to withstand the rending of it. For a brief while she looked at the westward window, that gave directly on to the cliffs of the berg, on the narrow gut of sea between it and the mainland. If she opened that and leapt . . . she could hear the sleet, and the gurl of the waves two hundred feet below her.

The sound of the sleet, driving against the glass, was cold. It forced her to think of Gilbert again, of his face staring at the coloured silk, his arm gone suddenly lifeless against her shoulders. If she died, she increased his burden. She must live, then.

She remembered then that only beyond the wall was the room that had been Bertha's—Bertha's and Gilbert's. She had lain in her own bed for two whole spring nights with Bertha dead within five feet of her. The memory had been too much that of a nightmare to haunt her before, make her feel her own room hostile : but it roused now again to an active presence. She had to stifle a scream with the back of her hand.

The extremity of the terror brought her courage. Standing against the high press she faced the room, faced the wall that hid Bertha's, and confronted them, with a passionate need to safeguard Gilbert somehow.

He was locked with her in this nightmare, and must be saved. It would drive them mad else. She brushed at her skirt instinctively, where the bright silks had clung . . . then knew she had done it.

She dropped suddenly to the floor, stretching her hands, and pouring out a wild spate of entreaty, under her breath. " Bertha, for God's sake spare him. It was my fault. It never would have happened but for me. If I'd done as you all wanted, and married Archie, it wouldn't have happened. He didn't mean to hurt you. And I didn't, truly. You were good to me. Oh, I know you were fonder of me than I was of you. But I did know you were good. And he always thought so. It wasn't his fault. It was mine." The wild whispering broke. The dead may speak, but we cannot make them listen.

Katie had made her a fire. She crawled to it, and crouched there, rocking herself, and very cold. She had to do something, somehow, about Gilbert. Surely, if Bertha had loved him, she would not torture. That she herself cared for him far more intensely than Bertha's placid affection was true enough : she knew it, and it made things worse again. She seemed to have stripped the other of everything.

Then suddenly, " No, no," she said. " You've that. You were loyal—you're better off there, at any rate. You didn't injure us, and we did you. Oh, surely you can afford to forgive us, then ? " There was no answer. When the windows were grey she dragged herself somehow on to her feet again, got out of her clothes, and lay shivering with her hair about her shoulders. The daylight was clear when she dared to let herself sleep.

CHAPTER XXXI

" To walk this sunshine morning a little way."
The Pilgrim's Progress.

In the morning, when her orders had been given, and she had put by some routine needlework, Anne ordered a horse to be saddled, and went out. It was the first time she had been on horseback since she left Kinnellan nearly a year ago. She wanted open space that was not the sea, to be away from the old house awhile, and rode up the green glen and inland. The day was fresh, silvery on the yellowish green of winter, with a light easterly wind, and the hills clear inland. A cottage had yellow stars of the winter jasmine, and a pale rim of snowdrops along a border, against black earth. She reined and looked at them: a girl, coming round the angle of the house, said, " Aye, they're bonny," with a shy smile to her.

Anne smiled back from her saddle, over the wall, and the child—she was a yellow-haired sixteen—turned suddenly pink. " I'll pick a wee bunch o' them to ye, gin ye like." Anne thanked her, and tucked them, tied with a yellow hair, in a buttonhole of her habit, and rode on.

She had come out deliberately to think, but it was not easy. The wide sober country, with the plough-horses moving slowly across the fields—she could see three teams at the moment from where she was, each with its trudging man and a cloud of sea-gulls—quieted her mind like a sleep, and the trifling kindness of the young lass who had given her the flowers left her

touched and comforted oddly. She walked her horse along the soft turf below a drystone dyke : there was a flower or two gleaming on the whin, and a thrush in a thorn-tree tried a phrase of a song, and could not make up his mind if the time had come for it.

She heard the clop-clop of a ridden horse from a side-road, saw a big man with a very ancient hat and a woollen muffler, astride of a rough-haired shalt—Father Cameron, coming back from a sick-call somewhere. He saw her and waved his hat, then rode up alongside.

" I'm glad to see you on horseback, Mrs. Keith. How are you keeping now ? "

" I'm quite well, thank you. It's a nice morning, isn't it ? "

" Good ploughing weather." He had a deep and pleasant Highland voice, that reminded her of Mother Felicitas. " You're going my way ? I'm on the road to Auchcairn, to see the old wife there. I go in whiles for a crack. She's the tongue you'd expect a Raeburn portrait to have, and we pass about the news of the parochine."

" She sounds interesting."

" She's all that, I assure you. Mainly because she's thoroughly interested—in her neighbours, too, and not merely in their sins. By the way, I had a line from my cousin yesterday—Mother Felicitas. She was asking for you."

" That was nice of her. I hope she is very well."

" I think so. Am I to say as much of you ? " The keen grey eyes regarded her shrewdly and kindly.

" I am quite well now." She drew the end of her switch down her horse's neck, and he waited for her to go on, but she did not. He had been her confessor now for over a twelvemonth, and thirty-odd years' confes-

sional or consulting-room teaches a man who is no fool to begin with to guess a good deal of what is not said to him. But the girl was not in confession at the moment. He could not question her, yet he was aware that her spirit was troubled, out of tune with the morning. He wondered if her marriage was turning out ill. That Keith would do his best for her he was certain, and he knew, too, that they loved each other well. His acquaintance with Gilbert Keith, a Presbyterian, was slight, and mainly on Hospital Committees—and one interview, last June, in Kinnellan Tower. But he knew him for an upright man, and liked him. Anne he knew better than she realised: her confessions were of her sins and not of herself, and he knew her all the better for the fact, and was very fond of her. He looked troubled now.

They went on in silence to the road-end of Auchcairn, and halted. Anne grew aware that she was silent.

"You'll give my love to Mother Felicitas? I'll write to her soon. Ask her to remember me to Miss Jardine, will you, and to Sister Agatha and Sister Catherine, and to tell little Jeannie I haven't forgotten her. She was the little maid who looked after the boarders."

"Yes, I'll do that." He half wheeled his horse, and halted. He had a Highlander's hatred of interference in what did not concern him . . . but this probably did. "Mrs. Keith, advice is an old man's privilege. I've had time for a longer range of mistakes than yourself, and if this is no good at the moment, it's just possible you may find it useful some day, and can forgive me."

She looked at him, questioning, but without resentment. He went on, looking straight between his horse's ears. "There's many a man before now has been damned, or has lengthened his purgatory at any

rate, for thinking he'd win God's forgiveness without any trouble. But there's a temptation opposite to that, that's maybe more dangerous still for certain people—for a man to put himself in the power of evil through not thinking that God's forgiveness is infinite. Lucifer might have recovered from his fall, if he could have made himself accept a pardon."

Anne stared at him, her gloved hand on her horse's quarter. He laughed, a little apologetically. "You'll forgive me rehearsing a bit of Sunday's sermon. Well, well. I'll need to be off. My regards to your husband." He lifted his hat to her and wheeled into the farm-road, reined a moment with a gesture of benediction, and trotted off towards the steading of Auchcairn.

Anne crossed herself mechanically at the blessing, and sat there, looking after him, for a long time. A lark began to sing high and sweet above her—the first of the spring. She looked up a little wildly, then suddenly gripped her hands over the reins and began to pray, wordlessly and without clear thought, but with a passionate importunity, a rush of the will that made her whole body tense.

The effort broke with its own stress after a time. She came back to the road and the February fields, breathing as hard as if she had been running, and taking her watch from her breast looked at the time. It was well past twelve. She shook her horse to a trot.

CHAPTER XXXII

"These things must not be thought
After these ways."

Macbeth.

SHE had no time to change, but washed her hands, and came into the dining-room still wearing her habit. They kept early hours at Kinnellan and lunched at one. Gilbert looked surprised when he saw her. "Are you going out?"

"I've been," she said. "I rode up as far as Auchcairn."

"Oh!" He looked rather hurt, but covered it. "I'm glad you're feeling fit for the saddle again."

"I shall probably be very stiff to-morrow!" She began to speak of the weather and the garden.

She went up to change after they left the table, and coming down in her brown cloth dress again found that the door to the gallery was open, and Gilbert walking up and down beyond it, smoking a pipe. She halted for a moment, her heart beginning to beat unsteadily. Then she went on, and into the gallery. He was watching a passing steamer from a window, and the strong diffused light from a silvery sea picked out the short grey hairs above his temples. Then he heard the sound of her dress, and turned to her.

She said "Gilbert," and stopped.

"Yes?"

"Gilbert, this can't go on."

He looked at her with a sardonic hint of a smile, opened the window and tapped out his pipe, closed it

and put the pipe into his pocket, then waited, with formal courtesy, but said nothing. A wave of desperate anger rose in her: he was not going to help at all. Oh, very well, then. She must do without his help . . . and began again. To withdraw now would be worse than to go forward.

She repeated, "This can't go on. We've got to do something."

He would not pretend he did not know what she meant, but was shaken with a furious futile anger. What was the use of dragging the thing to words? He said harshly, "If there's anything to do! Do you think there is? For I confess I don't."

"We've got to get back, somehow."

"Get back!" He laughed. "Get back to what?" and she could not answer him. Then he cried out savagely, "How can we get back? There's you, and Bertha. . . ." He broke off at the name.

"That's what I meant." She held her ground desperately.

"You mean I've got to bring her back to life, and you—Well, it's a fairly ambitious programme. How do you think I ought to set about it?"

She had to close her eyes on the pain a moment. "We can't do that," she said when she could speak. "But we've—you're thirty and I'm twenty-one. We may have half a century to live yet."

"Quite so. A long life and a merry one."

"I've never thought you were a coward, Gilbert."

He winced, and then sneered. "You'll find out a good deal about me in half a century."

"I know a good deal now." She faced him with his own angry arrogance. "I know I love you, for one thing."

It was hardly what he expected, in the context. He was too angry to answer without brutality, so held his tongue, and she was forced to go on, without clear sense of what she had to say. She had come to him on a sudden wild compulsion, without thinking out what line was possible, or if there was anything to say at all.

Now she went back to the basis of the thing. "You think that we can't remedy what's done?"

"It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Yes. That's perfectly true. But—Gilbert, we can't leave things to go on as they are. We'll go mad if we do. We've got to settle something."

He winced, and his eyes were less hard for a moment. "God forgive me, Anne. I've brought you into this."

"That doesn't matter. I mean—oh, it does matter. But not so much as a lot of other things."

"No? What?"

Her courage very nearly failed her. "We can't do anything to help Bertha now, except to pray for her soul, and I do do that. And to be sorry. She was my friend, remember. And your wife. I owed her—loyalty—as that. For your sake. You'd promised. I shouldn't have let you break it."

"There wasn't much 'let' about the thing, I think."

"Never mind that. I can't help what I've done to Bertha. Not now. And neither can you. But we've hurt each other."

"I've hurt you. Do you think I've forgotten it?"

"No. For I've not forgotten it hurt you." She lifted her head and looked at him very squarely. "If you had hurt me in sheer ignorance, it wouldn't matter what you had done to me. In so far as it wasn't just in ignorance, it hurt yourself, made you less. That's the hardest thing. But, dear—I wish I could make you

understand. You failed yourself then because I tempted you. I didn't mean to, but I must have done it. It couldn't have happened, at least, if it weren't for me. That means it's my doing. Will you let me destroy you? Have I to know—you couldn't hurt me more deeply—I've hurt you—oh, if you like, made you hurt yourself, beyond any kind of remedy, when I love you?"

His wits, slowed down by pain, dragged at the argument. It was a point of view he found hard to grasp. "I'm sorry, dear. I don't see what you mean."

"You wronged me—well! You did your best to mend it. You've been very good to me since we were married. But you'll make it far worse—make it more than I can bear—if you force me to believe I've ruined you."

"How? You?"

"Yes. Haven't I? You say it yourself."

"No. Before God, I never accused you, Anne."

"Ah, but you have, just now. What else is it, to say there's nothing to do but—go on like this? I let you give up Kinnellan for me once, though I knew it was the dearest thing you had, because you could do nothing else with honesty. I had to bear it. I deserved to bear it. But this—I won't bear it. You've no right to make me. Can you never forgive me?"

"Forgive you, Anne? What on earth—? It's myself I can't forgive. Don't you know that? Do you think I've ever blamed you for a moment?"

"Perhaps not. You revenge yourself on me, all the same."

"For God's sake, what do you mean?"

"To see you like this. Hopeless. How could you punish me more than that?"

"Anne!"

"I've deserved to suffer. But I can't bear that."

"My dear, my dear, have I hurt you as much as this?"

"You don't want to, then?"

"Want to? Good God! I love you."

"I know. That's why I can——" She staggered suddenly, and reeled against the frame of the window a moment, then pulled herself together, avoiding his hands. He stayed facing her, his knee on the window-seat.

Anne sat down, her hands in her lap, and looked up at him, her dark hair against the green paint of the shutter. "We've got to face this now. We love each other. And we've wronged ourselves, and each other, and God, and Bertha. And it's driving us mad. Or it will if we cover it up as we have been doing. I've been nearly happy, most of the time, for weeks, because I wouldn't think about anything, and so have you, I think."

"Yes. So I have. Most of the time."

"I thought so. But we knew. We were putting it off. We could, when I was ill. I had to get better. Besides—But I'm well again. . . . Well, we forgive each other, at any rate. And God—I think He knows we have been—sorry. There's ourselves and Bertha, then. Bertha's easier, maybe."

"She was a good soul."

"Yes. That makes it—better. I was going to say worse, but I don't know if it is. She didn't know the most dreadful thing, at least. . . . What you said about her baby's eyes being like mine. That was worse than anything."

"I suppose it was. But—Well!"

"Oh, I know. I do know. You'd so much the

worst. And she never knew of that. She was happy over it. But I thought of it, when you told me Baby was dead. No—never mind that now. It's about Bertha. It's easier for her to forgive us, in some ways, because she didn't do us any wrong. I think, if she knew—— "

" She was a good soul. I expect you're right. As it happens, I've never been unfaithful to her. . . . Oh, you know what I mean. Before. But she would have forgiven me, I think. That hasn't worried me. That sounds pretty brutal. But that's not what I mean. And I'm fairly sure I didn't mean to kill her, or even hurt her. I might hurt you, Anne, if I were angry with you. But not Bertha, I think. Not on purpose, at any rate. She'd forgive me, anyhow. That's what's the matter."

" You mean that if she didn't—— ? "

" I could forgive myself ? No, not quite that. For I did marry her. She wasn't forced on me. I chose to marry her, on my own judgment of her, so to speak. If I back the wrong horse, I expect to pay my money, and I shouldn't think very much of myself if I didn't. If she'd been a wrong 'un, that didn't let me out. But that's not the point. She wasn't, by any means. She kept her half of the bargain, and I didn't. And seeing that I—rather looked down on her. . . ." He broke off. " On the top of that, there has been you. And I love you, Anne. And I was your guardian, too."

" Yes, I understand."

" Do you think I can take you now as if nothing had happened ? "

" No, no ! " She checked the involuntary cry.

" Exactly." He laughed grimly. " That's how *you* feel. Well—there you are. I've got Kinnellan, and

I've got you for my wife. At Bertha's expense. And incidentally, yours."

She would have run then, but her body failed her. Her mind did not. It was mercilessly clear. She had to see his face as he looked seaward.

Then she heard her own voice. "Can you afford to despise her as much as that?"

"What do you mean?"

"So much you won't take her forgiveness? You know she'd give it. We've no right to assume she wouldn't be generous. Even if she wasn't. But I believe she would be. We can't insult her by thinking otherwise, anyhow."

He stared. Then, very slowly. "By God, you're right. . . . No, Anne, you're not. What would you think of me, if I sheltered myself behind two women's forgiveness?"

"Is that worse than sheltering from it, if you need it? Or can you not forgive *us* because you've wronged us?"

"Us? You mean you and Bertha? I don't understand."

"Apparently not. I would rather think you didn't."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"You would make amends to us. You won't take anything at our expense. You won't be in our debt. We must be in yours. Is that generous, do you think?"

He did not answer.

She went on fiercely. "You looked down on Bertha. Oh, so did I, God forgive me. Well—we're beneath her. We've no right to be proud about forgiveness. We've got to accept it, if she would give it us, and we'd insult her if we thought she wouldn't. Do you think I like it any more than you do?"

He was mortally pale. " I let you in for this. Anne, what can I do ? I've brought you into this."

" Do ? " she said. " Do ? What you'll never do, I think. Accept forgiveness. You don't love me enough. You could humble me, but you can't humble yourself."

" Anne ! " he cried then. But she went out of the room, her skirt whispering a little over the strip of matting, and did not look back. He heard her cross the drawing-room, go up the stair, and the closing of a door. He did not see her huddled beside her bed, but she lay there for some hours, and could not move.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"O long, long's the winter nicht,
And slowly dawns the day."
The Wylie Parrot.

WHAT the rest of the day was like, neither remembered. They met at dinner, but she had to go, before her soup was eaten, or break down. Gilbert bade Taggart send Katie up to her, but it was the girl's evening out, and Tina, who came, was easily got rid of. She sat alone, or paced the room up and down till she grew weary of the weight of her silk gown and thick coiled hair. As she lay down at last she stiffened suddenly, and listened, her eyes dilated. There were footsteps. But the door did not move. It might have been the sea. She almost swooned at the relief from horror.

Katie brought breakfast instead of her bath water: she supposed by Gilbert's orders, but did not ask. He was out when she got down, had gone to Stonehaven. She put on a thick coat and her garden gloves and apron, and worked until she was pretty thoroughly tired, came in and lay for the afternoon on a sofa, with a novel. The heroine's various misadventures were much more real than anything at Kinnellan, at the moment. There, there was only a gap in time. She dressed carefully at last, and went down to dinner. Gilbert told her punctiliously of his day's doings, and went to the business-room after, to write letters. She escaped to her room as soon as she decently could, but it was long before she took off her dress.

She had hoped to sleep when she got into bed. Her

head seemed empty of thought. But she turned uneasily, and by and by her hair worked loose from its braid, and worried her. She rose after a time, took a drink of water—there was a little moonlight—and crossing the room in the dusk shook out her hair, combed it back from her face and began once more to braid it, when there was a sound, unmistakably, at the door.

She stood still. Her white face, faintly lit by the moon, confronted her from the glass. The knock was repeated. The glass showed a thread of brightness along the threshold.

Anne moistened her lips, made some sound of admittance. The door opened. It was Gilbert, carrying a light. The thick dark dressing-gown that he was wearing made him fantastic, and his face was deathly.

A mortal pity gripped her. He came in, put down the candle and closed the door behind him, and then she half-swooned in a crazy sickness of horror, for there was reluctance in his every movement. She heard him sigh as he came towards her, forced herself from an ineffectual withdrawal. He did not speak. She bowed her head wearily, waiting, saw the dark skirt of his gown advance to her, and sagging in his stiff arms, moved as he would. He struck out the light with his hand: the darkness covered them, and she lay like a dead woman against his body, broken with pity past sense of her own shame, and suddenly driven to agony with longing, hurled back on itself. The nightmare came to an end. They clung together, forlorn and unappeased, each feigning a sleep that did not deceive the other, and heard the monotonous breakers beneath the Tower, till the false dawn showed the shape of the windows a little, and passed to the heavier darkness before the morning.

He stared on into it, listening to the waves. Anne

lay by him lifeless as an empty garment, but he knew she was no nearer sleep than himself. To go was to admit to her that he knew it: and he could not leave her to face the night alone. Not after this. . . Besides, there was some faint and weary comfort in being where she was. The night went on.

The darkness was paler a little, and very slowly the shape of the windows grew defined from the void. The shadow within ceased to be even-textured. Patches of it loomed thinner, less substantial. The darker ones took vague shapes, and one gleamed faintly. There was light enough to catch the glass a little.

He was drifting to a comfortless dozing slumber, that was more a change in the focus of the mind than any sort of rest of mind or body, when there was a start of movement against his arm. He roused. The shapes of the room were defined in greyness, and Anne had stirred. At that, without a word, she broke suddenly into a dreadful fit of weeping, that seemed to tear her whole body. He lay still, stricken with pain, not knowing what to do, till he felt a tear splash suddenly hot on his fingers, and could not bear it. He gathered her against him, rocking her like a child, his cheek on her hair, till the storm went by, and she clung to him more quietly, worn out, but, he knew, finding some sort of control.

Her voice, very small and ashamed, came out of his shoulder. "Have you a handkerchief, please?" Of course he had not, but reached the sheet-corner and fumbled for her face, dabbing at it with awkward gentleness. She began to cry again a little then, and he found it was possible to speak to her.

"Hush, sweetheart. You'll make yourself ill if you cry like that. I'm here."

" I'm sorry. It's stupid of me, dear. I won't cry any more. Please, I want a handkerchief."

" I haven't one here. But I'll get you one. Where are they ? "

" The top drawer on the right hand side."

He went obediently, and could just make out the dim white pile of them, and a scent of lavender. He brought the top one, and touched her temple. It was hot with fever.

" Look here, I'll sponge your face. You're all begrutten. You'll be much more comfortable." She said " Thank you," gratefully, and he padded across the room to the washhandstand, got a sponge and towel, and gravely applied them both. Anne smiled, a rather grotesque and ghostly smile, but he was rewarded, and as she pushed back the tangled hair from her face discovered something else that he could do, and brought brush and comb. " I'll brush it for you, shall I ? "

Her eyes thanked him, and she moved to let him reach it, and lay still while he carefully went about the work and plaited it at last into a braid that was nearly as smooth and stiff as a length of cane. The ends of it defeated him, however. She had to come to the rescue and knot it off.

He carried the brush back to the dressing-table, returned again, and knelt on the floor beside her. There was no colour yet, but he could see clearly, see Anne, a small crumpled figure with tear-marred face, woefully childish, the absurd stiff braid straight out along the white pillow behind her head. She put out a hand to him, and he broke down, his forehead on it, in hard ugly sobbing.

Anne roused with a little low cry of sharp concern, reached him at once, and drew his face to her. He felt

her fingers glide underneath his cheek, withdrawing the lawn from against it, and leant there comforted, with no strength left, but not resenting it now.

Her free hand touched his hair with small mothering movements. She said, " Ah, but you can't stay there, dear. You'll be cold," and drew back. He roused, a little forlornly, at that, realised that she had made room for him beside her, and stumbling there found comfort again and rested.

He wakened to sun and the clatter of Katie's bath-cans. She was spreading Anne's big bath-sheet on a chair, her blue-and-white starched back turned decorously, with a neck honestly scarlet above her collar. But he caught the tail-end of her grin as the door closed. He reddened himself, and laughed, and turned to Anne. She hid from him, and so much as he could see was rose-colour, and at that he laughed again, bent over and kissed the back of each hand gently, till her eyes looked out from them, did as much for those, and left her. She heard him go swinging down the stair, and sat up. There was sunlight and a clear spring morning.

CHAPTER XXXIV

" Diffugere nives, redeunt iam gramina campis. . . ."
Od. IV. vii.

A STRONG space of land, in a silvery April sunset, *Mach Ghirginn*, the old Sword-Country, the ploughed Mearns. Gilbert gave Todd his horse and came up from the stable, but turned off at the door—it was hardly time to dress yet—and came on Anne in the garden. She called to him, " Come and see the daffodils," and he went over, where a border of them grew under the lee of the Tower.

They danced, low stars, in a wind of the early dusk. There were other stars, showing faintly to the eastward, in a misty blueness. It was spring in earnest. The garden smelt of earth and of flowering currant, and the sun had shown the green haze across his fields.

Anne slipped her hand through his arm as he came beside her, and moved her skirt out of reach of his spurs with the other. The little sway of her body, turning to lift it, was part of the wind that blew, clean and salty, shoreward. Her shoulder came more closely against his arm. She did not tell him that, in the afternoon, as she spoke to Mrs. Reid in Stonehaven High Street, Loutit had come on them from a shop doorway, and his laugh had accompanied her on her road home. Gilbert's face to-night, looking across the garden, was content, though the mark of the last year showed on his forehead: the incident faded from significance, and her eyes followed his to the Tower and the placid sea, where the sails of a ghostly schooner showed going southward.

They walked back and forth on the grass by the square

carved well-head, planning the summer flower-beds, in the dusk. The windows of the dining-room were lighted, and Taggart moving beyond them with glass and silver. A waft of warm smoke came down to them in the wind, and a young moon rode over the distant hills, through rounded cloud. They went in after a while.

He washed and changed, the warm water and fresh linen pleasant to his slight pleasant sense of fatigue, then left his room and came through the gallery, pausing to watch a steamer's sailing lights move steadily north to the Baltic or Aberdeen, found Anne in the drawing-room as the gong sounded, and followed her down. The candles were lit on the table, but the windows uncurtained on a sober twilight, that lingered beneath small stars even over the sea.

Taggart put down the bright tureen in front of him, and lifted the smooth curved lid with the Keith arms. The broth smelt good. He took up the heavy ladle, stirred the barley with a judicious deliberation, and filled Anne's plate and his own. Lifting his spoon, he said, "We'll soon be dining without candles. I think I'll have to teach you to swim this summer. You'd like that?"

She looked at him over the flowers, and smiled.

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